

THE  
DIVINER IMMANENCE

---

FRANCIS J. MCCONNELL

BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS  
LIBRARY

IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF

BORDEN PARKER BOWNE

FIRST PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY, 1876-1910

FIRST DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, 1888-1910

February 21, 1928

231

M13d





# The Diviner Immanence

BY  
FRANCIS J. McCONNELL



THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN  
NEW YORK CINCINNATI

DUSTON UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS  
LIBRARY  
MS

Copyright, 1906, by  
EATON & MAINS.

32032

First Edition Printed March, 1906  
Reprinted February, 1910; May, 1916

BT  
124  
c 06

TO  
MY WIFE

ck5244





# CONTENTS

---

	PAGE
I. The Divine Immanence.....	9
II. Is Everything Divine?.....	12
III. The Way Out: Divine and Diviner Immanence.....	14
IV. The Problem of Immanence in Nature..	18
V. The Problem of the Dark Side of Nature.	23
VI. The Problem of Evolution.....	26
VII. The Problem of Miracle.....	34
VIII. The Problem of God's Transcendence of Nature.....	55
IX. The Problem of History.....	64
X. The Problem of the Scriptures.....	73
XI. The Problem of the Christ.....	91
XII. The Problem of the Church.....	114
XIII. The Problem of the Individual.....	132



## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS essay deals with some popular misunderstandings of the doctrine of the divine immanence. The title is not intended to disparage the current doctrine but to point to that spiritual immanence for which the divine immanence as ordinarily understood is the pre-condition. Whatever may be worth while in the essay has been suggested by the study of the philosophy of Professor Borden P. Bowne, though Professor Bowne is not to be held responsible for anything that here appears, or the weight of his great authority claimed for this informal treatment of the simple and obvious distinction between different kinds of nearness.



# The Diviner Immanence

## THE DIVINE IMMANENCE

IF we were asked to name the most absorbing theme at present before the theologians, we should probably give the first place to the current doctrine of divine immanence. For the last thirty or forty years many factors have worked together to press this doctrine insistently upon the attention of the thinking church. If we were to try to mark with a date the start toward the newer conception we might go back a few decades to the announcement of the theory of evolution. The evolutionary statement taken merely as description, and not as philosophy, was felt to bring the Creator very close to the ongoings of the universe, and the philosophy vastly deepened the sense of a divine nearness. Instead of a Prime Mover long since withdrawn from a machine which he had wound up and set running, or an Absentee fashioning a world from the outside, we were told of an Immanent Life

brooding over plant and animal types, carrying them onward from simplicity to complexity and upward from lower to higher.

What was begun in the study of the organic was carried to the theories of the inorganic. The physicists, formerly content to think of atoms as little bits of matter which they agreed to break into no smaller bits, came to think of atoms not as pieces of stuff but as centers of force, or rather as spatial points at which works the one Infinite Force. The theologian quickly identified this Force with God, and the identification came all the more quickly through the understanding that the Law of which the physicist makes so much is best conceived as the expression of a consistently working Mind. We have come pretty widely to discount the idea that the discovery of law in nature does away with the need of mind. We rather insist upon a new watchword,—the more law the more mind. The presence of mind in an immense industrial system like a railroad is shown most conclusively in the completeness with which order and schedule govern smoothly even the least details. The theologians have felt that the discovery of smoothly working laws in the movements of stars and molecules makes for, rather than

against, the immediate presence of a mind in the kingdom of nature.

Last of all, the masters of high philosophy have played no small part. They have taken hold of idealism with new grip and have shown that a thing can be only as it can act; that there is and can be no place for mere stuff in the universe; that if there were such stuff we could not in any manner become aware of its existence, for we can know only that which thought can seize; that mind is the creator of all things. They have even given us most excellent reasons for believing that space and time are merely forms of the mind's knowing, without substantial reality in themselves. We are not far from the Creative Mind either in space or in time. In a fresher and more vital sense we are very near the Creator,—so near that in him we live and move and have our being.

These various agencies have been re-enforced by others less discernible though not less effective. The new thought somehow falls in with the fashion of our intellectual day, and not all the forces which beget the popularity of a fashion can be grasped and described. For example, the old tendency to deism has become unpopular not only because of the

formal reasons brought against it, but because men have grown tired and sick of deistic philosophy. Without being able to tell just why, men feel that the emphasis suggestive of deism has failed. The newer teaching has come in to fill a real want and is received with all the heartiness which a really promising newcomer usually commands. The popular doctrine, then, is the doctrine of the divine immanence. It is this which shapes the theological writing and much of the preaching of to-day.

## II

### IS EVERYTHING DIVINE?

THERE are some, however, who do not feel entirely happy with the changed emphasis. They would like to welcome the latest phrasing of the thought of God's immanence, but they are thrown into grievous unrest by many of the new prophets. They know not what to make of the utterances of those enthusiastic devotees of the immanence philosophy who proclaim that God is so completely in all things that he is in all things human; that in fact there are no things human which are not



also divine. In other words, some are puzzled to see how the system saves itself from the shipwreck of pantheism. Again, they are at a loss to know just how to meet the claims of those who use the latest theological arrival to sweep away all differences and grades and distinctions of meaning whatsoever. Where there is no distinction of meanings there is no intelligible meaning. There must be rejoinder to those who use the current philosophy as a sort of crushing roller to level all persons and things to one plane with the summary pronouncement that God is in all things alike. Furthermore, not only the friends of Christianity but its enemies are in the new school. Where one camp finds in the system vindication and support of Christianity, the other is ready with the boast that modern thinking does away with Christianity by eliminating the need for Christianity. Just how are we to think of Christianity in relation to this phase of current philosophy? How can we make the new system give forth that distinction of sounds without which we may as well not march to battle? What are the limits within which the system is of value? If we can get these difficulties and others like them cleared away we can add greatly to the

efficiency of the teaching of divine immanence. What is the way out from these perplexities?

### III

#### THE WAY OUT: DIVINE AND DIVINER IMMANENCE

THE way out is along one of those homely paths whose very obviousness sometimes makes them obscure. There are clearly, when we stop to think about it, different kinds of nearness,—lower nearnesses and higher nearnesses; nearnesses resembling physical contact and nearness of intellectual and spiritual sympathy. Two men clasp hands; in one sense they are near together but in another sense they may be far apart. One may be an Anglo-Saxon and the other a Patagonian with all the distance of civilization between them; one may be learned and the other ignorant with all the distance of intellectual culture between them; one may be a gentleman of keen sensibility and the other a dull-nerved boor with all the distance of refinement between them; one may be sanguine and the other despondent with all the distance of temperament

between them; one may be a Frenchman and the other a German with all the distance of national antipathy between them; one may be the winner and the other the loser in a greedy struggle for the same prize with all the distance of personal hatred between them. The gulf between two souls may be so wide that any attempt to bring about a touch of elbows will only intensify the mutual loathing. Two men may be grinding at the same mill; one may be taken by some profound spiritual quickening while the other is left. There is a nearness of physical contact, or physical communication, and a nearness of soul. The latter nearness is the nearness of mutual understanding, of reciprocal interest, of sympathetic coöperation, of shared burden-bearing, of fellow-feeling, of good comradeship.

Now it seems very clear that the nearness which philosophy and science can establish is largely the lower kind of nearness. As will repeatedly appear in our discussion, this is not intended as a depreciation of the worth of philosophy and science. No more indispensable boon for human thinking can be imagined than the removal of the massive misunderstandings which have seemed to put God on the far side of a barrier as broad as the

material universe. The thought of the cosmos as a huge, self-centered, self-sufficient sphere with God off beyond the outer surface has been one of the appalling facts of history. The revelation that the physical creations are not barriers from God but lines of communication with him is one of the glorious triumphs of the mind of man. The explorers who sailed out across the seas and proved them to be not impassable boundaries but outward reaching highways no more deserve to be held in immortal honor than do the clear-sighted philosophical discoverers who have seen that matter is not a mass of dead weight to keep us at world-length from God, but rather a lively form through which he manifests his immediate presence.

In saying that the nearness which philosophy and science can establish is largely of the lower kind, we do not mean that these do not give glimpses of the divine meaning which put us into spiritual touch with the Mind back of all. From the experiment of the scientist and the reflection of the philosopher we feel at times as if we had laid bare the very secrets of the Almighty. After philosophy and science have gone their length, however, we have to say that their help is largely of the

lower kind, though the value of their help is incalculable. They rid us of paralysis in the presence of physical vastnesses, and make us feel that spatial and temporal limitations are shadows of the mind's own casting. They can show us that God is not physically distant from us, but they cannot alone bring us to the higher nearness of sympathy with him. After we have found elsewhere the thread which we follow till we come out into the light of the Father's love, they furnish abundant illustration and confirmation of the faith to which we have attained; but in themselves, apart from something which brings us into the higher contact, they act largely as pioneers to clear the way.

It is the purpose of this essay to reënforce, in terms of current thinking, the age-old thought that in Christianity, not merely in the creed of Christianity at any one time, but in the general view of God and man which comes with Christianity and in the spirit which vital Christianity breathes, we have given us a diviner nearness, a deeper immanence, than merely scientific and philosophical labor can establish, though the lower nearness may be gloriously preparatory and introductory to the higher. In this distinction be-

tween the two kinds of nearness, simple and obvious as it is, we have something which may help us to keep our bearings in the many currents and cross-currents of modern theological thinking. The purpose of this essay may be served by applying the distinction to certain problems of present-day interest.

#### IV

##### THE PROBLEM OF IMMANENCE IN NATURE

WE are told in the contemporary phrase that nature is not to be spelled with a capital, that it is nothing of itself but always and only a system of God's present workings, no more able to stand alone than thought apart from a thinker or deed from a doer. Nature is not stuff but thought, acted out by the ever-present, ever-working will of the Divine Doer. In this conception we are steeped by the abundance of present preaching and in the abundance we rightfully rejoice. Nature is no longer thought of as a self-running mechanism with which God has no immediate connection. It is no longer necessary for God to break through anything to get to us.

Under the sway of the old notion, even though we looked upon ourselves as sons of God, we were prone to imagine God as so barred from us by the material machine that he could reach us only by stopping, or reversing, or breaking into the system. Now we know that he is manifesting himself as truly in the orderly movements of sun and seasons as in any miraculous raid into the system from without.

Suppose, however, that some man should take this new idea of God in nature and forthwith make it a ground for withdrawal from all direct interest in Christianity. Suppose he should say to us that he has received new light, that he has come to realize that God is immediately present in the works of nature, that as he gazes upon the fair face of the fields he comes face to face with God himself and that therefore he has no need of hearkening to any revelation. The voices of nature are the voices of God. The world is an expansive book on whose pages are written the thought of God. The universe is primarily a medium for the revelation of the inmost spirit of God.

What would we say to all this? First we would respond that all which the enthusiastic

convert to the new doctrine claims is in a measure true, but only in a measure, for there are two kinds of nearness. The man in the fields is no doubt standing face to face with God, but is that a warrant that he can read God's face? The voices of nature are the voices of God, but is that an assurance that we understand the voices? The thunder is the voice of God, but is not the language foreign to most of us? The American Indian thinks of the thunder as the voice of the Great Spirit but he interprets the voice in a manner repulsive to our thinking and feeling. The world is no doubt the book in which God has written many of his meanings, but is it not possible to handle a book without being able to read? Does mere contact with covers and pages bring understanding of the printed words? Suppose the entire universe to be what we are agreed that it is,—a flexible mechanism for the setting forth of meanings. Is it not possible to stand near an instrument without being able to make sense of its utterances? Would the statement that a printing press is for the revelation of thought be especially illuminating to a Central African pigmy?

The believer in the all-sufficiency of his



new creed would probably at this point break out with the protest that he is not a Central African pigmy, that he is familiar with the teachings of modern science and the utterances of the nature-poets. So far as science is concerned we need only call to mind the fact that science is so taken up with the discovery of the means by which results are accomplished that it is entitled to say very little as to the higher worth of the results. To recur to our printing press illustration, the scientist would busy himself primarily with the levers, and wheels, and types, by which the word is printed while the value of the word itself might have very little concern for him. We are coming to the conclusion that the scientists are a sort of committee to report on the ways and means by which the universe proceeds, and that they themselves are not the only interpreters of the value of the facts which they uncover. After the scientist has brought forth his contribution the further question remains as to the worth of the contribution.

Here our friend of the open fields may speak of the poets and their insight. The fine flights of the poets are indeed among the

great glories of human genius, but it would be a good deal of a strain on our intelligence to hold that the poets got their insight wholly from gazing on the fields. They came to the fields with certain conceptions of the meaning of life and nature, and they found in the landscapes illustration and quickening of conviction and ideal already held.

We come now to the kernel of the question. The poet, in so far as he possesses real insight at all, gets it through a nearness to God of the higher kind,—the nearness of inner sympathy. In bringing men to that higher nearness Christianity plays a part which can be taken by nothing else. By Christianity is, of course, not here meant the acceptance of this or that creed, or the observance of this or that form of ritualistic ceremony, or the obedience to this or that set of church commandments, but rather the attitude toward life and its meaning which Christianity does so much to further. It is from the spirit of Christianity that we get a hint as to the meaning of nature's voice and word. Let the scientists find and publish all the facts within their reach. In the final interpretation of the facts, the general world-views and particular will-attitudes fostered

by Christianity will hand down the decision. To Christianity preëminently belongs this realm of the higher nearness.

## V

THE PROBLEM OF THE DARK SIDE  
OF NATURE

WHAT we have said above becomes especially pertinent when we confront the dark side of nature. The man of the fields with whom we have been arguing is very apt to take his walks on the sunniest of days, and to see only the happier features of the summer afternoon landscape. He is asleep when the night comes, he sits by a comfortable fire-side during the fury of a storm, and he is blind to the ravages taking place at his feet even when the outward aspect is altogether smiling. The doctrine of divine immanence, if taken with real seriousness, gives us a God busy with some terrible deeds. The man of the fields needs no great exhortation to convince him that God is in the daisy and the violet, but what about his presence in the ragweed and the burdock? God is no doubt in the liquid carol of the robin, but is he in

the silent swoop of the hawk? He shows his thought of beauty in the butterfly; but what about the hornet and the mosquito? Then these various creatures under foot,—worms and bugs, toads and snakes,—how are we to think of God's nearness to these? Once started on this track there is little chance of stopping at any very consoling station. So much seems murderous that we can very easily persuade ourselves that nature is a gigantic organization for assassination and thuggery. Science has here very little in the way of substantial comfort. The increase of knowledge even through telescope and microscope is the increase of sorrow, for the extent of misery grows upon our imagination with every added world. The pain of the universe also has a way of becoming distressingly concrete at times. Even the speculations of the philosopher may be halted by a sharp twinge or a dull lassitude which makes it impossible to control the mental stream long enough for any worthful measure of consecutive reasoning.

If the believer in the doctrine of the divine immanence will take up this problem with anything like the seriousness it deserves he will speedily wonder if in one sense he is not

too near God, too near to escape the terrible agonies which God is every moment causing. If God is in all these things what wonder that the untutored heathen pictures him with the form of a serpent whose fangs it is the first duty to escape? We are all face to face with awful facts. We can hardly be blamed for looking upon ourselves as at times too near them. If the believer in the doctrine of divine immanence relies upon science and philosophy alone, and rules out Christianity, only native and constitutional cheerfulness, combined with a happy dullness, can long keep him from the conclusion that God is an uncomfortable neighbor, too appallingly close at hand.

This would be all we could say if it were not for a higher nearness. Two friends reach the very completeness of spiritual proximity when they can trust each other, even though they cannot understand each other. There comes a sympathy, which, in the midst of dark and inscrutable doings on the part of one, prevents the other from questioning and sustains him in perfect confidence. This trust lies at the very center of the Christian experience. Where you find a man who trusts in the goodness of God even

at the times when he is not able to understand the meaning of God you have come upon a heart essentially Christian. The power of Christianity never more signally appears than when it lifts our souls to this intimate nearness which can trust God when the appearances are all against God. We look abroad and behold the densest mystery but we are not cast down. We writhe with desperate suffering,—and hold fast our conviction that all is well. We stagger under crushing burdens,—but insist that the burden will prove in the end a delight. If we stopped short with the lower nearness, the mere recognition of the fact that God is causing all things, we should be of all men most miserable; we might even become blasphemous or mad. The higher nearness comes with blessed relief. Along the pathway of Christian experience we attain to sympathetic confidence in God and rest in an inner communion with him.

## VI

### THE PROBLEM OF EVOLUTION

AT this juncture we shall quite likely be reminded that in the modern doctrine of evolu-

tion we have a treatment which floods the mystery of physical evil with new light. The various forms of pain-causing instruments in the world are many of them survivals of lower orders of existence. The vermiform appendix in the human body is the remnant of an organ which was once useful, but which long ago ceased to be of service. A great swarm of like instances might be cited.

How this helps us, especially in connection with the merely philosophical doctrine of immanence, is a little hard to see. The relief here is for rather slowly moving sense-thought. The idea of leftovers which we have to put up with as best we may is more of a comfort to sense-thinking than the thought of harmful features as at present designed parts of the system; but the aid is short-lived, for only a moment's reflection will discern that immanence can hardly allow survivals to linger along on their own account. All must be sustained production or reproduction. The vermiform appendix is here because the Creator is now putting it here. So with every other disagreeable feature of the physical universe. If we take the new doctrine for what it really means there is no way of clearing God from immediate responsibil-

ity for the pain-producers of the world. The realization that he is near in these agents is of course of more real comfort to steady thought than the fancy that he is far away. If he is back of these dark doings he is back of them for a purpose. If the pain-makers were left-overs they would argue a bungling and mussy workman, unable to finish a piece of work with a neat touch or to clean up the litter after he had finished. The conviction that God is in these aspects of existence only urges us on to the search for that higher kind of nearness which brings us to some sort of sympathetic trust in him; and thus makes faith possible when knowledge is impossible.

The believer in immanence relies much on the doctrine of evolution. It becomes incumbent on us then to look further at the doctrine, at least in its outline, to see how much real nearness it establishes and of what kind the nearness is. The ordinary evolutionist would probably at once tell us that evolution comes about through the working of immanent forces, that powers within change the form from simple to complex and from low to high. He would replace the simile of the watch with the simile of the flower. Instead of Paley's watchmaker working upon ma-



terial from the outside, he would posit an immanent force building up flower or animal from within. He would welcome anything which would lay emphasis on the "within." If we should point out that the "within" can hardly be spatial, he might respond that he does not care so long as the essential thought of the closeness of the force to the work is brought out. The correspondence of inner and outer may be the correspondence of the spatial to a thought which is not spatial, but the evolutionist of the type here considered is willing to concede every scruple of the philosopher if only the immediate dependence of the process on God can be made sure.

This, it seems to us, the evolutionist does establish. He has brought new strength into the argument for the immediate presence of God in all his work. Every stage begins and must end in him. But when the evolutionist goes on to insist that his doctrine of an immanent God, proceeding according to the evolutionary formula, is enough for every purpose, that it is the great revelation which outranks every other revelation, we must advise caution, and point out that the doctrine really does not help us very far toward the higher nearness of a real understanding of

God. If we have already certain main conceptions of God we can find in the doctrine much to illustrate and buttress our previously reached conclusions, but the doctrine of itself does not add as much comfort as could be desired.

Let us look at the doctrine from the viewpoint of its interpretation of the methods and spirit of the immanent force. We are told that the progress is by natural selection. When we get near enough to natural selection really to see how it works we find a result about as follows:—The immanent force calls into existence ten million seeds, and kills off nine million nine hundred and ninety nine thousand. It creates animals by the hundreds of thousands, and forthwith sends all but a few hundred to death. In general, it seems to fumble along by a series of rather cumbersome experiments. If an intelligence in need of a beast of burden should call into existence a thousand horses, look them all over, try first one and then another and finally end by slaughtering all but one or two, we should have about the same kind of method as that displayed in natural selection. Natural selection never troubles itself about the expense.

We are next told of the survival of the fittest, and we are thrust into a veritable nest of troublesome interrogations. Who are the fit? Those who ought to survive or those who do survive? Does the vermiform appendix belong in the category of the fit by virtue of its survival? The evolutionist would respond that in the main those who have the higher type of ethical fitness survive, and this raises the question as to who does the surviving. It can hardly be the individual. What would the survival of the fittest mean to a soldier dying for a cause which he thinks right? Light might break here with faith in immortality, but evolution itself has little to say about personal immortality. Is the survival, then, that of an ideal?

If we could tell who are the fit, and what is survival, and who are the survivors, we should not be at the end of our list of questions. As we glance over the entire evolutionary movement, we are at a loss to know just how to gain the inner meaning of the procession, and our old bewilderment comes back to us. We are instructed that the direction of the procession is from lower to higher, but this is somewhat confusing in sound of the ceaseless march of social groups

and individual persons downhill and to the rear. What is the standard of value by which we are to estimate the worth of results? The progress from simplicity to complexity does not tell us everything, for simple good may give way to complex evil without getting out of gear with evolutionary programs. Some have thought that the clue to the meanings of things is to be sought in their beginnings. This seemed promising until we were brought up with a mental jerk by the declaration that man is essentially brute because of a brute origin. By this test, too, the theory of evolution itself is not old enough to deserve any large volume of enthusiasm. Then others flew to the opposite extreme and insisted that the latest introductions into the system are the most worthy. But how are we to know that these are not semi-accidental or secondary,—how, that is, on the basis of evolution alone? Some have hoped to find the longed-for solution in those climaxes when the slow preparations of the ages crown themselves with the final quick result which ends an old and begins a new stage of progress.

In general, we do find in such climaxes hints of profound import but these seem more

illustrative of a theory already held than direct revelations of a fresh truth.

It may seem strange to read, after utterances like these, that this essay is entirely friendly toward the modern doctrine of evolution. Only we must maintain that the theory is not to be used to belittle Christianity as a revelation of an Immanent God. The doctrine of evolution itself makes clear a certain kind of nearness. It furnishes material for solidifying our conviction that no spatial or material barriers separate us from God, since all nature is alert with his life and shows us something of God's method in his unfoldings in nature. The final meaning of the great plan it does not find. The diviner nearness comes with the attitude of Christianity. The God of evolution is, in spite of appearances, a God of love. From this higher revelation we can re-read the evolutionary story. We can think of the long drama as indeed a struggle toward higher life. We can put an optimism into all the upward strivings; and since we believe that all nature's factors work out the purposes of Holy Love we can bear with the awful facts which the doctrine of evolution, if left to itself, would only make more awful. We are

told that evolutionary progress is from the simple to the complex. The progress from the complex to the simple, which takes all the intricate meanings of the doctrine and reduces them to simplicity, is in the faith that all these complexities are part of the one plan of an Almighty of holy love.

## VII

### THE PROBLEM OF MIRACLE

FROM the discussion of evolution we pass naturally to the theme of the miraculous. One of the truths established by the theory of evolution is, we are told, that there is no break which can be described as miraculous. The doctrine of immanence goes further, according to some adherents, and shows that there is now no need of miracle, since the natural, as the immediate product of the Divine Will, is just as divine as any miracle could be.

Our thought of the higher kind of nearness comes in at this point to stay us. The debate is not wholly shut off with the discovery that the process which we call miraculous is no more truly the product of the divine activity than the process which we call natural. It

may be that the event which we think of as miraculous is upon occasion much better fitted than the natural to bring us near God in the sense of understanding his mind and heart. We are assuming in this discussion that the worth of the spiritual communion of men with God is supreme. If this assumption be granted, there can hardly be reason for protest against any miracle which really brings men to a better understanding of God.

Protest is immediately forthcoming, however. There seems to be no tendency, on the part of any theological thinking at all progressive, more unmistakable than the pressure to get rid of miracle. In the study of history and Scriptures and individual religious experience, the aim seems to be to bring every event within the realm which we call natural. This comes not only from men who are using naturalism with the desire to eliminate God, but also from those who are trying to make a useful tool of the belief that the laws in ordinary operation around us are expressions of the method of the immanent God, and that from the mastery of these laws even that which in past times seemed miraculous is to be understood.

In handling this contention we may dis-

miss at once the fancy that either the possibility, or the impossibility, of miracle is a subject for formal proof. Science cannot prove that miracles are impossible or religion shore up its claim with syllogism alone. The most either side can hope for is to establish a presumption for, or against. The entire debate lies in the realm of grounds of belief, rather than in the province of strict demonstration. The disbeliever in miracle can only hope to show that acceptance of miracle is irrational as against his opponent's contrary view. There is no formal scientific or philosophical principle which will make the foe or friend of miracle yield in unconditional surrender either to the other. Nor need we try to start with some exact definition of miracle. There is no such definition upon which both sides will agree. We would best rather examine the real forces which make against the acceptance of miracle as these find voice in some objections which seem to the opponent of miracle always legitimate and inevitable.

One objector would speak in the words of the Master, when he declared that a wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and would protest that the recognition of miracle is a condescension to that low,



grovelling hankering after magic and portent which marks the coarse-grained and commonplace. To accede to miracle is to reopen the door which after centuries of struggle is just now closing against superstition.

This would be a forceful protest if we were pleading for the signs after which an evil and adulterous generation grovels, but we are not. There are miracles and miracles. From the nature of our argument, we are contending only for miracle as a means for getting men into communion with God. We are trying to suggest that some miracles may have a power of bringing men and God together that the natural process has not. It would be, of course, possible for men to take even the miracle most heavily laden with rich meaning and contemplate it solely as a magical wonder, but there is no way of guaranteeing any good deed against misunderstanding and abuse. The spontaneous, irresistible love which out of compassion for the crowds multiplies loaves and fishes lets men have a glimpse of the very heart of God. If now some seek the wonder simply for the wonder's sake, this is not to be laid up against the miracle.

Another abhors miracle just because he

thinks of it as a departure from the natural. He regards the natural as the indispensable provision for the intellectual and moral sanity of men, and shudders at departure from the natural as a removal from the foundation of the kingdom of the sane.

If we cared to tarry for a little with this objector, we might convince him that there is no great safeguard for the sanity of humanity in some phases of the natural as the natural is often conceived. Imagine for a moment a race of creatures endowed with intelligence living in a universe composed wholly of water. A fall of the temperature to below freezing point would be in perfect harmony with natural law. It might be that scientists of that watery world would have from their laboratory experiments knowledge of the transformation of water into ice. If they kept their sanity in the presence of a possible annihilation at any moment, it would be because of a trust in something deeper than the merely natural which would keep the temperature above freezing. To pass out of the realm of the imaginary to the sphere of the actual, we all know that there would be no necessary lapse from natural process in such a change in the temperature of the

earth's surface as would render life inconceivable. The planet might be switched into a new orbit according to the demands of an altered solar system and the instantaneous obliteration of the race come by perfectly natural process. Many of us keep whatever sanity we have by refusing to think of such possibilities, but if we do ponder them we have to search for some deeper ground for trust than the merely natural, unless, of course, we lift the idea of natural to a higher altitude and think not so much of what may be natural to a scheme of consistent laws itself, as of what may be natural to the God back of our system.

This is precisely our course in dealing with the miracles. We ask what is natural to God. We are all agreed that God is, and that he is mind and heart. Are not the new introductions in a masterpiece of music or of art or of literature miraculous from the standpoint of what has gone before, and yet do they not come naturally to the creator's genius? Is it not natural to love to seek for the unusual in expression? If God is mind and heart the belief in his striving to arrest the attention and arouse the love of his children by any means at his command ought not to

be self-evidently absurd. The great task with such a God would be to come into spiritual nearness with his children. Any means which would really conduce to this end would seem to be worth while. The degree to which it would be safe to intellectual and moral sobriety to permit the departure which we call miraculous might well be left to God in the full confidence that nothing in a real sense unnatural would come from him.

Another so defines miracle as to emphasize departure from law. For this thinker the universe is a network of interlacing laws which are the manifestation of the essential orderliness of the Mind back of all. God cannot go against himself, we are reminded. A miracle would be a contradiction for God, since the source of all law would in miracle appear as acting against law or setting law aside. The objector recalls us to our previous watchword:—"The more law the more mind." The railroad organization which is most often subjected to arbitrary interference on the part of its controllers, and is thus least ruled by inflexible regulation, is in the flabby grasp of low intelligence.

The fallacy here lies in saying "departure from law" and implying departure from all

law. Miracle may be a departure from a law without being a departure from all law. We assume again the law-abiding God, but we do not limit him to any one set of laws. The instrument of the law-filled universe lies in his hand for the purpose of bringing his children into personal touch with himself. The law may demand that at every death in the history of the race the soul departed from the earth shall not return, and this for the purpose of bringing the sons of God to deeper conscious dependence upon him; at every death save one, let us say, and in that one instance the same purpose, to bring the sons of God into dependence upon the Father, is served by the return of a soul to the earth. Shall we see departure from law in the return of the soul under such circumstances, or shall we see rather one great law fulfilling itself now in one way and now in another? Mere methods have no sacredness in themselves. The sacredness belongs to the backlying purpose. To recur to our favorite illustration, what would we think of a railroad bound so stiffly to rules that these could not be altered if the good of the public demanded it? To ignore a time-table for the avoidance of wreck ought not to lay the management open

to the charge of arbitrary lawlessness. The moment we avow that law is the method of God we have said all that is necessary. We all hold that there is nothing sacred in methods, that they are instrumental and subservient to the large purposes of mind. All that we ask of God's methods is that they serve the intentions of his wisdom and love.

Another varies his expression of hostility to miracle so as to put the accent on the supremacy of the ordinary as above the extraordinary. We are assured that there is no duty more pressing upon human thinking than the sanctification of the ordinary, that Christ showed his inspiration chiefly by taking the common, everyday forces of human life and making them the bearers of the deepest truths which God has for the human soul. We should imitate Christ and exalt the importance and might of the ordinary.

There is no gainsaying the strength of this position. The need is that men shall see the sacredness of the ordinary, but the objection is outflanked when we remember that the insistence of this exhortation is that we use the ordinary in an extraordinary way. It does not make the miracle of the Christ-life any the less to be told that the extraordinary

results of his life were accomplished by the use of the ordinary forces of human experience. There was in the Christ-life such a departure from everything we see in human life that Christ himself becomes the supreme miracle. He was such in his grasp on God and in his love for men that he could with ordinary instruments achieve an extraordinary result. This does not tell the whole story, however. The power in him seemed at times to burst of itself through all bounds and carry everything before it. The quivering touch on the hem of the garment revealed to a heart instantaneous in its sympathetic responses the immeasurable need of some stricken life, and instantly a wave of healing swept forth. The narrative would seem to imply that under such conditions the healing sympathy of Jesus could not be kept back, that upon the revelation of the need the remedy was spontaneously forthcoming. Suppose now some reader, familiar with our modern knowledge of the power of sympathy to banish disease, should say that we have here an instance of mind restoring body through psychic influence which, though not common, is thoroughly familiar to modern students. The adequate response would be that we have never

theless a departure from the ordinary. The ordinary method of direct treatment of the body is passed by for a still more direct treatment through the mind. Now love delights at times to act in this extraordinary way. It is part of the very nature of love that at times of crisis it will act in the extraordinary way. It breaks through ordinary methods for the immediate grasp upon the higher. The incident used above is itself a good illustration of the difference between the two kinds of nearness. There was the pressure of the crowd in which all shared, a pressure so great that we read that the multitudes "thronged him." There was on the other hand the spiritual contact between the mind of Jesus and the mind of the stricken woman alone, a contact of mutual understanding and trust. If God is a father of infinite love it is not to be pronounced incredible that upon occasion there may be this breaking forth into extraordinary expression. There are different ways of making revelations. To the average crowd it may be necessary to speak in the most ordinary and commonplace words, supporting and strengthening them by repetition and reënforcement. To an intelligence of quicker responsiveness argument,



illustration, and even speech may be altogether needless. It may require only the flash of the eye or the play of light and shade across the face to give full possession of the truth, especially with lives in spiritual touch. From the plane of lower mentality this would be an inexplicable miracle. For the prepared soul it may be that the Almighty has signals which gleam in a sky far beyond the ordinary. What to the commoner mind may seem a miracle may be just an abandonment of the ordinary machinery of revelation for that momentary blaze which is sufficient for the religious genius.

This deals with one end of the line. At the other there may be density or prejudice which nothing short of upheaval will break. It is not to be expected that the Almighty is to stop with an ordinary method if that is a total failure. We intend no irreverence when we say in regard to Paul that the sunburst on the Damascus road seems to have been a last resort on the part of God. If Paul could not read the message of the patience of the Christians whom he cast into prison, if the shining face of the dying Stephen could not break through his prejudice and misunderstanding, if the silent goading could not prick

him to comprehension, it would seem that nothing was left but to resort to the extraordinary. The Almighty's willingness to do this is measured by the worth of the object attained. It would seem to be worth while to resort to the extraordinary to transform Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle.

A still further protest comes against miracle, this time from the holder of a rigid doctrine of continuity. Nature and God, or, if we prefer, God in nature, moves without leaps. There is gradual approach with the gaps filled up for every step of the advance. This rules out miracle, for miracle clearly is a breach of continuity.

If we were to argue this out on merely philosophical grounds it might not be hard to show that such continuity as the objector has before his attention is rather slippery. He would hardly think of to-day's universe as having been present in the primordial matter, and of evolution as a simple unfolding of what had already been folded up or had existed in the fold from eternity. The objector believes in continuity as God's method in the building of the universe. With this belief, however, there comes inevitably the implication of the progressive calling-in of new fac-

tors; and, strictly speaking, the introduction of a new factor is a breach of continuity. To pass from  $a$  to  $a^1$  is a breach of continuity as to pass from  $a$  to  $a^n$ . The width of the breach is not the essential, but the existence of the breach at all. What the objector means by the law of continuity is perhaps rather that the orderliness of the system demands that every new factor be such that it fits into its proper place in the series  $a$ ,  $a^1$ ,  $a^2$ ,  $a^3$ ,  $a^4$ ,  $a^5$ , etc. We might urge in reply that among the factors constantly being introduced are persons born in great numbers every day. It would be interesting to see an arrangement  $a$ ,  $a^1$ ,  $a^2$ ,  $a^3$ ,  $a^4$ , etc., which would have any significance for the souls born day by day. Waiving this scruple, however, we do not find any insuperable difficulty in fitting the miracles which a wise Mind is likely to perform into any really important thought of continuity. The miracle of the life of Christ was preceded by an harmonious set of antecedents and followed by an harmonious set of consequents. This would seem to be about all which any theory of continuity which really understands itself could ask for.

The principle of continuity must be given a higher interpretation. Thus interpreted, it

becomes the continuity of aim and purpose. The plan may call for apparent breaks in the program, but the closer scrutiny of the plan may reveal no break after all. To take an illustration from history, Grant's purpose in the spring of '64 was to overcome Lee's army. The military critics are accustomed to speak of the transfer of the army to the south bank of the James River in the summer of '64 as a breach in the continuity of the campaign. All that the transfer meant was that Grant had done all he could north of the James, and that he had gone south to strike Lee from another direction. The one aim really remained the same. If it be objected that this suggests an unworthy anthropomorphism, that God is not an erring human general, the sufficient rejoinder is that even though God be unerring there is no guarantee against unresponsiveness in the free human wills with which he is trying to come into spiritual touch, and that if he really is in earnest he must use one plan now and, if this fails, another later. If we seem to suggest a God trying experiments and groping along by guess we reply that we can phrase the thought differently, that we can legitimately speak of God in his love as dealing with the human

soul by every expedient within his reach, so that the soul may have no excuse for final failure. If this argument be rejected, the rejection does not affect the obvious fact that differences in souls call for differences in treatment: this treatment for one and that for another. The continuity lies in the one aim ruling the dealings with each and all.

We have said so much of this general character that the objection which is urged in the name of "unity in nature" need not detain us, for there is nothing in the objection which has not already been considered. Unity does not mean that there must be only one way of doing a particular work. There may be many ways. If we take seriously our conceptions of the universe as a system of God's doings, there is no reason why we should narrow ourselves to the position that a single object can be achieved in but a single way. This would be to hamper the divine life with a limitation which we should resent if applied to ourselves. The real unity which the intellect seeks is that unity of purpose which makes every thought and deed, whether of one class or another, swing around a single center.

It will be seen that the conflict over miracle is a battle between differing interests.

The interests which are more narrowly intellectual rule out miracle. The passion for orderliness and regularity which seizes some minds is not altogether ideal. It may degenerate into a mere fussy intellectual crochetedness which is more anxious that the house be kept in order than that it be used as a dwelling place. The hankering for finality, too, draws back from, or rather sinks down before such an unsatisfying proposition as that the only finality is the purpose of the mind and heart of God. This leaves too much open. The intellect desires something more tangible. It is not likely, however, that anything more tangible will be furnished. The passion for explaining insists that to know God we must not rest till we think his thought,—which is perfectly true, of course, but we must remember that the thought of God is not confined to scientific fact-marrying, but that it includes the infinite purposes of infinite intelligence and the infinite plans of infinite love. If our only spiritual approach to God is to be the arrangement of facts in a circumscribed set of laws, then the protest against miracle is to be heeded. If our spiritual approach to him is of a higher order, and means sharing his wisdom and love

as well as his knowledge of facts and his power over them, then miracle may be a means of bringing the children to an understanding of the Father. If this seems to leave everything at loose ends we remind ourselves that there is no harm if we keep our poise with the belief that God is wisdom and love.

As a further word of reassurance to our objectors we avow that we do not see in miracle that complete departure from law which is such a bugbear to the scientific mind. It may be that with the advance of knowledge all the miracles of the Scripture, and it is with these that our concern lies, will be seen to be in accordance with laws which men have been late to grasp. We should have not the slightest objection to such an outcome. The Resurrection of Christ, to take the supreme miracle, will not be taken out of the category of remarkable departure from the ordinary if it is some day seen to be more thoroughly in accord with what we think of as law than it now appears. For example, weigh the suggestiveness of the appearance of the Risen Master to none save his followers. This may supply us a hint as to the piercing vision which will one day be given to all prepared

souls. It may be, too, that the body of Christ, mysterious as it was, is of the kind which is one day to serve the Christlike soul. This body might be under the sway of laws as definite as any which govern our bodies. The notion of miracle is very indefinite, as the preceding discussion implies, but perhaps it would require only our own deeper enlightenment to make the supreme miracle seem in itself one of the most natural events imaginable, natural to a God in love with his children and anxious to bring them into closest union with himself. It was not an arbitrary act out of all harmony with the character of God. It was certainly not outside the realm of the law of love, whether deepening knowledge ever makes it more intelligible after the manner of the "scientific" occurrence or not. From this higher view quite respectable considerations might be adduced to show that the supernatural is for God the really natural, and that what the scientist thinks of as natural is really a sort of sub-natural which God is compelled to use in dealing with human beings in a sub-ideal state.

It is not the aim of the preceding discussion to cast discredit upon that large school of Biblical students who reverently



seek for so-called scientific explanation of the miracles of the Scripture. Let the miracles be explained by what we know of natural processes of mind and body as far as possible. If Christ healed demoniacs by psychic remedies similar to those employed in modern asylums, well and good,—provided only the claim can be made belief-compelling. The sympathy of Christ is no less remarkable when it is seen to light, by inevitably sure intuition, on tactful wisdom which science is long centuries in overtaking. If a sharper scrutiny, or more detailed report by the original witnesses, would have stripped some narratives of the miraculous let the scholars be unhindered in their search for what did happen. The final test ought always to be this,—is the miracle in harmony with what has been happily called God's "style" and does it result in drawing us spiritually nearer him? If it is such that we cannot feel it worthy of a wise and moral God, if it clouds our spiritual gaze upon him and removes him into the distance, we must find in this failure to bring us spiritually near him a count against the miracle. But if, on the other hand, the miracle does beget in us a sense of being on better terms with God, let us not be intimidated

into the surrender of something like a veritable highway to the heart of God by the scientist's or the philosopher's inability to make a place for the event in his intellectual scheme. To recur to the Resurrection, the great argument for its truth is the mind of Christ, as Christ revealed himself to the disciples. How the disciples could have imagined such conversation and action on the part of the risen Christ is beyond our power to conceive. When the words of the risen Christ are studied, they are seen to compress within themselves the all-important essentials. We nowhere come nearer the heart of God than in the mind of the risen Christ. If this is true, it ought to require more than the oracular dictum of intellectualism to make us slacken our hold on a true appearance of Christ and put in its place the wild imaginings of a few brain-heated peasants. Again, we must not dogmatize about the Virgin Birth, but one feature of the Virgin Birth has not received due attention. That is,—in all the references to the Birth we seem to be in the atmosphere of divinity. There is absolutely nothing to shock good taste, and nothing to conflict with the feeling that in reading the narrative we have

come into a sort of holy overshadowing. The divine "style" again seems to mark every phrase of the story, and the tenderness of the holy love of God seems to breathe through every word. The account of Christ's birth is rendered with such exquisite delicacy as to cause refined sensibility to feel that in the very story itself God has come wondrously near. How much of an argument this is for the fact of virgin birth will, of course, depend upon the individual thinker, but there is no need of being browbeaten into scepticism by the overbearing and offhand assertion which pronounces the miracle beyond all possibility. We end as we began,—from the standpoint of the agency employed,—all occurrences whether miraculous or natural are alike divine. God is in all. But God is nearer spiritually in some events than others. We may well believe that in miracle God has at times come nearer than would have been possible by any process which we are accustomed to call natural.

### VIII

#### THE PROBLEM OF GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE OF NATURE

CLOSELY connected with the idea of miracle is the question as to the possibility of God's

transcendence of nature. The doctrine of divine immanence is so often set over against the doctrine of the divine transcendence that many have come to regard the two as in necessary contradiction to each other.

The doctrine of the divine transcendence has many forms, some of which we can dismiss with a word. The thought of God as transcendent in the old deistic sense seems to be the enemy which many of the opponents of transcendence are really attacking. Some others assert that they are contending for immanence and against transcendence when they proclaim the present spatial system as a field in which God must move and out from which he cannot pass. Others seem to imagine the present material system as a sort of body for God, mirroring all his intellectual content and conditioning all his activity. Oftentimes this conception takes shape as a kind of parallelism, every cosmic material process being thought of as accompanied by a phase of the divine consciousness, just as streaming changes in the human brain are paralleled by streaming states of consciousness. Others declare, with considerable vagueness but with great vigor, that God can no more transcend nature than he can transcend

himself. The last conception, of course, must be largely pantheistic.

A correct understanding of the doctrine of divine immanence disposes of many of these ideas at once. For example, if God be in this present world so completely that the old deistic thought of the absentee deity becomes forthwith meaningless, that is no reason for believing that our present universe limits or exhausts God. The highest form of the doctrine of immanence to-day is to be found in the philosophy which might be called objective idealism. According to such philosophy the material world is to be thought of as the immediate expression of the idea and will of the Almighty. That is to say, there is no such thing as matter in itself. Matter is simply the deed of God. There is no such thing as space in itself. Space is simply the form under which the will of God works. The material universe has no existence apart from the incessant energizing of God. God is forever causing what appear as things to come and go. This does not mean that substance is an airy subjective phantom projected by our own minds, but that it is a deed of God which comes forth from his will. The immediacy of the dependence of all matter upon God thus

comes to have a meaning which no space terms can express. Space is not a huge cosmic room simply "there" because it is "there," shutting God in to his work, but rather the form under which he himself and the minds created in his image perceive his work. If there were no Mind there could be no space.

This view, that space does not exist for God except as the form of his activity, gives us a hint as to some far-reaching possibilities. It may be that the idealistic interpretation of the divine immanence provides not for less space than common sense thinking holds to, but for more. It may be that there are for God no more limitations as to what we should call real spaces than there are for us as to imaginary spaces. A novelist might conceivably write half a dozen stories at once, one dealing with the Elysian Fields, another with Dante's lower world, another with More's Utopia, another with the land of the Lilliputians, another with Robinson Crusoe's island, another with Andersen's fairyland. If, now, he had the power to will these fancies out into expression as God wills the universe into expression, there would be no inherent reason why they should jostle or collide with one another. There is no more reason why two spatial sys-

tems are impossible for God than two spatial systems for the human imagination. The difference is that God has the power to energize his mental creation into reality as the human world-builder has not. Philosophical idealism bids us clear ourselves of the prejudice that there must be any self-existent, independent space in which this would take place. Space would be merely the form of these differing world-creations and the unity of space would be found not in any actual oneness of an "out-there" space but in the subjection of any and all forms of space to one space-law. God would be immanent in all these willed-out systems just as a thinker is in his thought. It might be that from this standpoint we could speak of all the above-mentioned conceptions of immanence as having a degree of force, though in a greatly modified form. It is quite likely true that God is limited to space in the sense that there are certain unalterable space-laws. It must be that every deed which appears as matter in any sphere is attended by an accompaniment of consciousness, in the sense that every deed of the Creator carries with it his thought and feeling. In these altogether obvious senses we, of course, concede

the forcefulness of the objections in the preceding paragraph.

We have set down this dry and abstract argument for an entirely practical reason. The promulgation of the divine immanence has had one or two unforeseen consequences in its protest against a mistaken idea of God's transcendence. The older teaching gave itself almost completely to exalting the heavenly world as the special abode of God, and life in that other abode as a coming into the immediate presence of God. The result was that the present life and the present earth were looked upon as far away from God,—to be endured as well as might be until the moment of closer approach to God through death. We all know the harmful results of this one-sidedness. When a noted religious leader began the Lord's Prayer with the address: "Our Father who art in heaven *and on earth*," he was wondered at as having made a daring departure from the viewpoint of his time. It was inevitable that, after the old deism had swung to one extreme, the new immanence would swing to the other. So that we have the current teaching that the present life is the especially immediate approach of God, that our purpose is to be entirely earth-cen-



tered, and that if there is another sphere and another life we are to let them take care of themselves.

The limitations of this new one-sidedness are already apparent. We have many of us come to a shortness of view as bad as the longness of view of our fathers. If our fathers lived a far-away, heaven-craving life, we live a short-sighted, earth-loving life. They acted as if they could not find God here and we act as if we could find him nowhere else. It will harm none of us to remember that there is nothing in the doctrine of immanence, rightly understood, to lessen our interest in worlds which transcend the present and in conditions of life in other spheres to which we are one day to come.

If we are to hold fast our thought of the higher nearness, and carry it out to its implications, we cannot cease to believe in the transcendence of the present sphere. When it comes to real spiritual nearness, our present conditions do little more than furnish a start. It is true that the earth is constantly coming to be more and more serviceable under the hand of man, but even at the best the training here is largely in the moral and spiritual rudiments. This leaves out of the account, too, all

those dark features which were made the subject of a preceding section.

Looking at life from the standpoint of the person, we may ask ourselves if the mental and spiritual faculties, as we have them here, are not quite as likely to be screens as windows. The senses may conceal more than they reveal. We can understand this if we believe that God at all times gives us just enough to keep us near him, but we see clearly that such a limitation cannot be regarded as a final ideal. We no doubt have all the truth that we can endure, but there must be a state where we can have more if we are really to come very close to God. So far as the higher nearness is concerned we may well believe that we shall be nearer to God in some other life than we are here.

Some one may protest that there is no need for such extreme provision as we have here made for the larger spiritual training-ground. Instead of all those regions whose conceivability is a strain upon our intelligence, why can we not believe the present system so capable of transformation and so loaded with multitudinous possibilities that all needs can be met while keeping ourselves to our universe as a material basis? If there is no self-evident

reason, for example, why thinking should appear as the accompaniment of brain processes, and certainly no reason why thinking should be forever limited to an accompanying brain process, what reason is there for holding that minds which have ceased to act in connection with bodies, as we know them, may not be acting in connection with some other form of matter? Is there not force in the idea of some contemporary philosophers to the effect that the Eternal Power is fashioning in the present organism another finer organism beside which the brain is the veriest clod,—an organism with power of moving with the swiftness of light, and capable of enduring without harm all the shocks which might be brought upon it throughout eternity? Could not such body, with its physical basis some set of definite combination of ether activities, let us imagine, provide the material means for that nearer approach to God?

We answer that our sole aim is protest against the misunderstanding of the doctrine of immanence which would tether God to the system as we see it, or as science conceives of it, and that reserves the central place for earthly estimates. The idea just advanced transcends that lower conception against

which we protest. All that we aim at in the suggestion of many material spheres is abundant provision for the higher nearness which is supremely important. It would seem that the universe as we see it and know it is not enough for eternal approach to God. If it really has no upper limit, and if its evil features are eventually eliminated, it may be that this system will answer the purpose as well as any.

Of course, it will be understood that by transcendence in this discussion we mean transcendence of the universe as we know it. If there are other systems, God is immanent in them as well as in this. By transcendence we mean that no one part of God's creation exhausts his entire power or meaning. It may be that the entire system at what we would call any one moment of time does not exhaust them.

## IX

### THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY

THE obstacles which impede us as we try to think through the doctrine of divine immanence in its relation to the world of nature

are as nothing, we are told, in comparison with the tangle into which we come when we attempt to harmonize the new thought with the career of the social organism. The field of human history has long been considered the stage where God has most clearly shown himself by miraculous interposition. We may be in doubt as to the presence of God in miracles in nature, but there can be no doubt as to his interruption of the ordinary course of historic movement time and again, when moral and spiritual interests have been at stake. There have been climaxes in human history so unmistakable in their bearing on the higher interests as to leave no doubt as to the setting aside of the ordinary by a special manifestation of the power of God. Now comes the new doctrine and drowns all distinction of voices in the revelation of history. All is from God and all is alike divine. God is moving in and through all things. More than this,—there is in the philosophy of immanence no stopping-place short of the absurdity that God is in human evil. If all comes from him, evil must also come from him. The declaration that God is in all things lands us in this overwhelming confusion.

The doctrine of divine immanence, rightly

understood, is not responsible for any of these results. Let us consider the last charge first,—that the doctrine makes God the author of human sin.

The doctrine of divine immanence is not to be identified with pantheism. In thorough-going pantheism there is no place for human freedom. All is of God,—sins and all. Of course, this view speedily brings shipwreck to any intellectual or moral system that has even a rudimentary understanding of itself. A theistic, as distinguished from a pantheistic, thought of immanence does not fall into this fatal error. It provides real freedom for the human soul. It stands between the pantheistic notion, that the soul is but a mode of divine manifestation without any real selfhood, and the deistic idea that the soul is all selfhood,—a reality in itself, set in existence by the Almighty but left thereafter to take care of itself except as it receives the help of the Almighty by interposition. The doctrine of divine immanence holds that the soul is in part an expression of the divine activity, that the creative agent at work in the building of the soul is God himself, that in one sense the soul is never left to take care of itself, that God is concerned in every move-

ment. At the same time there is real freedom. While keeping always in view the fact that the relation of the Divine Will to human freedom is a deep mystery, any theistic immanence-view that really understands itself will state the dependence of the soul on God somewhat as follows: God posits the soul by a process of continued creative activity. He makes the soul such that it can hold before itself two lines of action, that it can realize that one is higher and the other lower, that it can choose either of the two. Upon the choice of the one, or the other, the Creative Power marks the soul for better or worse. This is a crude statement, to be sure, but it covers the two points upon which the doctrine of immanence really insists: the immediate presence of God as an active agent in the unfoldings of the soul's life and the fact of the selfness of the soul and of those moral choices which God is forever taking into the account in his work upon the soul.

So much, then, for the doctrine of divine immanence. It is now clear that this doctrine is preparatory to a thought of diviner nearness, the nearness of grasp on the moral purpose of God. In the creative relation God is equally near all men. In the ethical relation

he is much nearer some than others. He is near all alike in that his fashioning activity is upon all. He is nearer some than others in that he has given larger revelations of himself to those who have most faithfully kept his commandments. He is equally near all periods of historic event and all peoples as Agent, but nearer those peoples and those epochs which have been more responsive to his desire and purposes than have others.

There come instants in the life of the race and in the experiences of nations when we get foregleams of what the real ethical nearness is one day to be; when we receive in the concrete an understanding of what a God-filled humanity actually is. Some irresistible patriotic passion which billows in the direction of righteousness sweeps over the hearts of the masses. With a victorious moral enthusiasm it spreads from the greatest to the least. Real meaning then weights the epigram that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Or some clamorous national need has stripped the desire of the people of all that is merely personal or local, or in a universal experience which in some crisis has pressed itself upon the hearts of all there is such manifestation of dignity or humility that we feel that we



have heard the voices from the Throne. On these occasions God is near the people in the higher and diviner approach. It is in this approach also that God is nearer at some times than at others.

God is near, too, in another moral drawing nigh, even when the heart of the people is far from him and the nations are rioting in revolting wickedness. When the peoples have disobeyed him and have gone astray their increasing degradation is a plain sign of his moral displeasure and a swift revelation of his moral purposes. If they turn from him he makes them such that their appetite for sin becomes more ravenous. God is never nearer to the discerners of his moral messages than when he metes out this terrible punishment to those who have willfully gone astray. The punishment is a revelation of his thought. Hence it is that the prophets have declared the presence of God in some great national calamities. The figure of the potter and the clay is ever suggestive. The pleasure of the potter is shown in the vessel of artistic beauty which grows under his skillful fingers. The wrath of the potter is shown in his casting the clay aside. The power of the potter is at all times upon the clay.

Nor have we yet exhausted the truth of the special nearness of God at particular times in human history. Apart from the revelations of nearness in approval or wrath, there are occasions when events seem, somehow, of themselves to come to a focus, or when there are stupendous manifestations of what the superficial call good fortune. In spite of all human effort, and contrary to all human expectation, events sometimes fall out in such manner as inevitably to suggest to the intuition of the devout an overruling Providence. Nothing in the doctrine of the divine immanence rightly interpreted will forbid our belief that at such junctures God comes especially near. He so shapes the march of events that, if we are so disposed, we can see a flash of his purpose.

The examples which readily occur to all probably come in largest number from the life of the Jewish people in the periods up to the Apostolic era. In the entire unfolding of Israelitish history we feel this special nearness. Now the doctrine of divine immanence does not deprive us of the exceptional religious importance of the history of the Jews, for we may believe that, in the career of the people who looked upon themselves as the chosen of

God, we do gain a revelation of the nearness of God to men; or we may take any other events that the wisdom of the world has fastened upon as showing the purpose of God. We must not allow the truth that God is in every storm to blind us to the special aptness of the fate which befell the Spanish Armada. God is no doubt at work in every event in the life of our American nation, but there is no reason why we should not say that in a high sense he came exceptionally near our limited understanding in the days from '61 to '65. The more we study those days the more firmly the conviction takes hold upon us that we are near God in the lofty sense of reading his plan.

In the study of history we are somewhat in the position of the spectators of an expanse of complicated military manœuvres. We know that plan underlies the drill from beginning to end, that plan regulates even the length of the private's stride and the bend of his fingers around his rifle stock, that every turn is according to order. There come single moments, however, when the purpose becomes especially clear. The wheelings are so focused or are so brought to a climax as to show something of what the general intends.

So it is in history. We feel that plan includes all and is included in all, but ordinarily we do not see the plan. At some single hour when events come to a focus or to a climax we get something of the secret of the divine generalship. Nothing in any true doctrine of divine immanence can deprive us of the transcendent value of these moments, for we may legitimately believe that the God who is in all doing as the agent and plan-maker has given us these inklings of the meaning. We could not proceed far in the theoretical study of history or in the practical applications of its principles to national life if we had not these special illuminations. We should be in hopeless bewilderment if the voices of history indeed gave forth no distinctions in the sounds.

In all our reflection upon history, however, we should be careful not to consider too small a focus or climax. The military critic draws a distinction between strategy and tactics in great campaigns. Strategy has to do with the entire campaign while tactics has to do with evolutions on particular battlefields. To get the correct perspective of history, it is best to keep ourselves as close as possible to the strategic center and to ask for the very largest wholes that we can handle. We must not for-

get that plan covers the entire expanse and that too short a view is sure to keep us from seeing the truth as God sees it.

## X

### THE PROBLEM OF THE SCRIPTURES

AFTER we have dealt with miracle and God's relation to history, it may appear superfluous to add a special section on the bearing of the doctrine of the divine immanence on the importance of the revelation of the Scriptures. There are many considerations, however, which justify and even make necessary a separate treatment. The preaching of divine immanence has thrown some into confusion as to the rightful place of the Scripture, and the recent increase of familiarity with heathen sacred books has doubled the uncertainty. Some, who have been captivated by graceful paraphrases of pagan writings, have claimed the doctrine of divine immanence in support of the inspiration of the pagan bibles. Since God is in all scriptures he is in these scriptures as truly as in the Christian Scriptures.

Wholesale denunciation of religious creations outside Christianity has long since ceased

to command respect. God is certainly in all the impulses of his children toward himself. There is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and we of to-day feel that every slightest yearning for further light must be heeded by that moral and reasonable God who considers the desire of the seeker rather than the goal at which he actually arrives. Many of the creeds hitherto ignored by us as alien contain numerous tenets essentially Christian. The doctrine of divine immanence itself has much to learn from India's brooding absorption with a God who lives, moves, and has being in all things. Throughout many Oriental scriptures are to be found scattered gems of Christian truth of purest ray.

These gems, however, are scattered and are often somewhat accidental in the theologies in which they are found. We have to test a religious scheme not by picked passages from its books or its life but by its fundamentals and by the practical trend of its entire mass of teaching. Estimating the pagan creeds by this standard, we cannot detect a presence of God like the presence in the Hebrew and Greek testaments. While God is in all literatures as the co-worker with all

minds, and while he is near them, too, in that he reveals in them some measure of his will, he is not in them with the clearness or the fullness with which he is revealed in the Christian Scriptures. If evidence were needed, we might contrast the practical results which follow the preaching of heathenism and of Christianity. The diversity of outcomes is eloquent enough. As another has said, Asia itself is the condemnation of Asiatic religion. Then we have the testimony of the satisfaction of our hearts to the superiority of the Christian system. We do not require prolonged argument to see that the thought of God as loftiest personality is worthier than the picture of God as dragon or serpent. We need not be profound philosophers to conclude that there must be some vital difference between a religion which teaches that man is a son of God and one which teaches that he is less sacred than a cow or a monkey. Of course it would be possible to manipulate syllogisms even here, just as it would be possible to make a show of formal reasoning to prove that the chorus of the Central African pigmies is to be put on a level with Handel's *Messiah*. The inspiration of the God of all melody is no doubt back of the choruses of

savagery and of civilization, but we should hardly care to say that the inspiration seized Handel no more divinely than it seizes the pigmy. If some professional logic juggler should still attach great weight to the fact that the Central African feels just as positively the superiority of his music and his religion as we do ours there is, of course, no answer, and there need be none.

We believe then that in the views of God, and of man, and of life, which are given in the Christian Scriptures, we come nearer to God than in the views of any other scriptures. If any one should seek from us a reason as to why God has thus come nearest in our Scriptures we should respond that we have not the slightest explanation. As holders of the belief in divine and diviner immanence we do not recognize any responsibility for such decisions. We simply record our belief that, in the light of the moral and spiritual power which we possess, God has manifestly come nearest in our Scriptures. There may have been at the beginning a revelation which the races shared in common, or they may have begun somewhere near the same level, and that level a high one, and the heathen nations may be the descendants of those who somehow left



the track and started down. Or it may be that the widely accepted view of to-day is nearer the fact,—that the starting-place was at a low level and that success in high development has belonged almost wholly to one religion. Any speculation here would be digression,—it suffices that we recognize another instance of the Almighty's choice of one people before others. There is no telling the why of this selection, but similar selections for particular favors are common enough.

A careless handling of the doctrine of divine immanence might lead to another mistake,—the elimination from the Scriptures themselves of falls and rises of significance and the reduction of all passages to uniformity and equality of revealing power. Thus the latest teaching might land us in the same predicament as an older method and impair the helpfulness of the Book by giving us a colorless monotony. Some parts bring us nearer God than do others. There is a center around which narrative, law and prophecy turn. The spirit and character of the central Person of the book are the touchstone by which every sentence is to be examined. God was no doubt in the old Mosaic code. He had to take human beings just where he found them, to speak

with an unfortunate suggestiveness which the deist may welcome. He had to deal with them just as they were. At the beginning the cruelties of the old system seem necessary to his plan. We have it on highest authority that God permitted some imperfections because of the hardness of men's hearts. In dealing with hard hearts the use of hard instruments can not be avoided, and the instruments become sacred to the intention of the Almighty. They are divine, as coming from him, but they do not fulfill the ideal which he craves for us and which becomes possible with our closer and closer approach to God through submission to the higher influences. It is at times difficult to feel that God was in some of the grim features of the Hebrew patriotism, but we are helped by remembering the distinction between instrumental and final conceptions. God was in all these things in that he was in immediate contact with them, using them as instruments. The cry of David, that he would be happy who should take the little ones of Israel's enemies and dash their heads against the stones, may have revealed a spirit that God could use effectually for the advancement of the divine kingdom, but it can hardly do much for us to-day as a revealer of God's attitude toward men

or as a manifestation of the spirit of his heart. We have a loftier revelation and must lift up our eyes to its highest reaches. The distance from Moses to Christ is very great, and greater in no direction than in the spiritual spaces which separate the religious ideals of Christ from those of the earlier time. It is the spirit of Christ which furnishes us our measure for estimating the nearness of the different utterances of the Scripture to the real center of the divine love.

God's relation to the Scriptures may for the moment be imagined as that of an author to his book. Let us suppose for illustration that no human instrumentality had intervened in the composition of the Scriptures. Let us assume that the Book had been found or had been delivered to men in such a mode that we could not for an instant doubt that every word had been written by God himself without any reliance upon men whatsoever. In such authorship God would have in one sense been in all pages of the book alike. All would have been alike divine, as coming directly from him. Even in such a book, however, some portions would have been more truly divine than others in the higher power of letting us see more clearly than others the inmost spirit of God's

message. The writer would have been in every word of the book, but that would not have made the secondary and accessory details as radiant with light as the climaxes, no matter how essential to the narrative the secondary items might have been. We can hardly suppose that a book written thus by God would not have the climaxes, the flashings of divine genius, such as the greatest of human books have. There would no doubt be sentences which, like divine epigrams, would gather the very soul of the entire book into themselves and send it gleaming forth. In one chapter the message might form into rhythm and sweep along with the melody of a mighty hymn. The musical charm of such phrase might itself be more quickening than anything in prose. The book would come somewhere to a focus, a gathering together of all the beams of light, and here the glory would blaze forth as nowhere else. The author would be in the climax as he would be in no other chapter or pages.

If this would be true in a literary creation solely from God how much more is it true in a work written, as we know our Scriptures to have been written, by practically all sorts and conditions of good men. Such author-

ship would result in more unevenness than the wholly divine production. Men and times would vary greatly, graver difficulties would emerge in selecting the standard for the estimation of the spiritual worthfulness of different passages. Practically, however, there ought to be little trouble in the study of the actual Bible, for the Book clearly converges to a focus and rises to a climax in Christ.

We touch now the vexed theme of inspiration. Can our doctrine of the higher nearness help us? We believe it can. We must concede that in one manner all men were equally wrought upon by the Almighty. He was the ubiquitous inspiring force. But one man was better than another man, or more of a poet or a prophet or a seer than another, or lived in a different and better time. So the more favored or better worshiper came closer to God than the others. Here we are dealing with the problem of selection again, or what the apostle might have called election. One man is chosen above others. The truth is that inspiration is so much an affair of persons and of personal relations that there is no way of deducing a formula. One man comes nearer to God than others. To show how evasive the subtlety is we need only

remind ourselves that higher nearness has here a double meaning. We may speak of the seer who himself comes nearest to the divine and grasps it most certainly,—the saint with unusual endowment of religious genius, let us say. This man himself takes hold of God with a grip which brings him very near God. Another may be just as much of a saint, but his genius may run not so much to assimilation as to expression. We say of him that he brings God nearer the people than the other leader. Or, again, one plain matter-of-fact man may be drawn nearest to God by the reading of the driest chapters of Chronicles. Still our thought of the higher nearness does help us to see that, after all, inspiration is just this higher approach to God. While it is not necessary for us to dogmatize with the denial that no writer of another book has ever in any passage been inspired as were the writers of the Scriptures, it is entirely permissible for us to hold that we may believe that because of the exceptional religious opportunities in which they lived, and because of the exceptional endowments they possessed, and because of the exceptional piety of their lives, the writers of the Scriptures were inspired in a manner that no other writers have

ever been inspired. Their work has brought us nearer to God than the work of any others. If there seems to be something inherently unjust in this, if this seems to say that no one else will ever have the opportunity for religious revelation which came to these early men, we have to reply that the injustice is of a kind to which we have to submit every time we see a genius. Or, to make the analogy broader, we may think of the exploration of the world from Columbus on through a century after. Through exceptional opportunity and exceptional endowment and exceptional personal endeavor the explorers of that time accomplished a task once for all,—a task in which they can never have rivals. The writers of the Scriptures performed the great service of the discovery and exploration of the spiritual fundamentals once for all.

We close this section with a word as to our thought of diviner nearness and the modern critical scrutiny of the Bible. It would be difficult to overestimate the good effects that have come or that will come from the study of the Scriptures by the newer methods. Not only have we found new life in the Book but the reverent laborers have done much in sifting the essential from the non-essential and

in clarifying the great outlines. We have then only kindly feelings for the present-day method of study. There are some dangers, however, which come to those who merely read about and talk about rather than master the new method.

The first danger is that of discounting the Book because scholars insist that by modern methods traces of legend and myth are discovered, errors in history and science revealed, and the crude and imperfect nature of the moral and religious notions of the early stages brought to light. It is affirmed that grotesque ideas of God have been held, that these have sometimes been reached through unseemly approaches, that the Divine Being has even been looked upon as using dreams and trances as a favorite method of illumination. Prolonged gazing upon these conclusions rather than careful reflection upon them has begotten in many minds already indifferent toward Christianity a deep prejudice, in some other minds a pathetic and distressed scepticism. The confusion has been increased by the railings of avowed enemies, "Show us thy God in these new revelations," and the frantic shoutings of the conservatives that all modern Biblical research is from the



pit. The outcome has been that multitudes of good people who have not time to look into these matters have about concluded that the newer schools of Biblical study have exiled God. The believer in divine immanence is asked repeatedly to show how God can be in the crudity and error which some students profess to find recorded in the Scripture.

There ought to be no great difficulty in showing that the newer thought really brings God nearer. In the first place we have godly men approaching the conceptions of their day from a lofty religious standpoint. They took the views of the creation of the world which prevailed in their time and used them as an instrument for bringing a God into life,—and a moral God at that. Let it be granted that the first chapter of Genesis may not have seized with scientific accuracy any of the steps by which the world actually came into existence. What of it? Scientific accuracy here would at most be but a relative of that lower nearness of which we have so many times spoken. The higher nearness the writer has,—and this is all-essential. The whisper which called these men to the higher thought can have come from no other source than God himself.

In the next place we have a God using every possible means to bring men near himself. If God is so near that he can speak moral truth and religious inspiration through whatever knowledge and belief may characterize any period we have that higher nearness which is supremely important. If he can get into the dreams of men and even work through their trances, if at the start he must limit himself to dreams and trances, what are we to say but that he is nearer than he was in the conception which would make life abnormal by the introduction of scientific and historic fact for which the race was not prepared? To take an illustration drawn from a later period in the world's life, we have known persons to be disconcerted by the historians' assertion that the discoveries which came at the close of the Middle Ages came because the craving for spices in the throats of a people which knew not good cooking made necessary the discovery of a new route to the East, and thus led to all the glorious uplift of the later day. The yearning of a physical appetite has seemed to one party so unworthy and to another so self-sufficient as a cause of a great historic advance as to put God very much at a distance. It really brings him

nearer. He is so near that by a touch upon the palate he can make men lift the curtains off the worlds. So in the Scripture. We have before us in the teaching and character of Christ a Father longing to come to his children by any approach whatsoever. The Book becomes all the more divine when it shows us how quick God was to take advantage of any avenue to his children. He used these lower features of life, the misunderstandings and what we should call the superstitions, to bring men to himself. Through these he made his spiritual approach and along these he led his children to himself.

It is imperative for the historical critics to learn that the pedigree and biography of ideas are not the sole considerations in the valuation of ideas. The ancients believed the pearl to be condensed dew of heaven, but the discovery of the actual process of pearl-making has not detracted from the beauty of the gem or cut down its market value. Some omniscient evolutionists locate the origin of the decimal system in the inability of the first men to count beyond the number of their fingers and toes, but this announcement will hardly deter the modern arithmetician from reckoning by tens and hundreds. So the

ideas of the Scriptures may have to the eyes of the fastidious critics an unseemly beginning,—as unseemly as an oyster's discharges around an intruding sand-grain or as the first man's puzzled fumbings of the digits. Or the idea may at one time or another have been forced to keep bad company. Hardly a conception in the entire realm of human science but has a skeleton in the closet somewhere in its history. Astronomy began with astrology, chemistry with alchemy, physiology would not for centuries cast off a troop of doubtful boon-companions. The idea-genealogists are always interesting and sometimes indispensable, but they are apt to be poor judges of the present worth of the conceptions whose descent they trace. After we know what an idea is worth for present purposes we may or may not care to hear its history. Some ideas once useless are now of surpassing effectiveness, and *vice versa*. The final question is always, "What is the idea worth now?" The history is of value as it puts us on the path to an answer to this question.

There is another peril in the newer criticism for which some of the critics are directly responsible. Some of them have run

off into technical professionalism and have thus lost sight of the fact that, after all, the critics' reproduction of the actual historic setting of the events of the Scripture has its justification in sharpened insight into the meaning of the event. This direct insight is the approach of the higher nearness and depends upon something more than mere fullness of knowledge of material incident. The latter is akin to the lower nearness. Take our relation to the character of Christ. Any increase of our knowledge as to the actual picture of his life, and the historical frame in which that picture is set, is of value not in itself but for the light in which it places the spiritual expression upon the portrait. A photograph of Christ would have value only as it would enable us better to read the spirit of Christ.

We must protest against being bound by the critics to too small an outcome in the interpretation of the Scriptures. We must, of course, not violate any principle of sound exegesis, but when we try to get at the heart of a passage we are not to restrict ourselves by a student's narrow rules. The Scripture shows itself to be of Christ in nothing more wonderfully than in its power of suggestion.

If we light upon a suggestion in the Scripture which appeals to our moral and spiritual sense as worthful, we are not to stand helpless before the critics' declaration that we must not read meanings into the Scriptures. The scientist reads meanings into nature. Within certain limits the power of spiritual imagination tends directly to that inner approach to God which we conceive as all-important. We are not to allow the critics to be our sole guides in the interpretation of Scripture. They help us to the facts, but we interpret the fact in accordance with other demands than those of technical criticism.

We must insist upon our distinction between lower and higher nearness when the critic tells us that the most matter-of-fact portions of the Scripture written by men who stood closest to the characters which they describe have necessarily the most authority. The student would discount the Fourth Gospel because it evidently dates from a later year than the other Gospels and because it shows more of a tendency to interpret than to set forth the objective fact. Keen religious sense feels instinctively that there is something wrong in this position. The reason lies in our feeling that the writer of the Fourth

Gospel has in the higher sense come nearer the mind of the Master than have the writers of the other Gospels. The others are nearer the actual material Life, perhaps, but not so near its spiritual springs. The real nearness, we repeat, is not the nearness which occupies itself most fully with the objective features but that which penetrates most deeply the spiritual contents.

## XI

### THE PROBLEM OF THE CHRIST

WE come now to the bearing of the doctrine of the diviner immanence on the interpretation of Christ and his supremacy.

The charge is sometimes urged against the doctrine of immanence that it does away with an indispensable element in the incarnation,—that its position is that God was in Christ but that he is also in other men; that he could be no more immediately near in a miraculous life than in the life which the ordinary man lives; that the metaphysical relation of the Son of God to God was not different from the metaphysical relation of the sons of God to God.

The upholder of divine immanence might fittingly respond to this charge that there is nothing in his doctrine which really does away with the unique metaphysical relation of Christ to God. He could very reasonably argue that the metaphysical relation of any soul to God has its own peculiarities. We speak of persons as having differences of endowment or of constitution. This can only mean that the work of God in the creation and conservation of souls is distinctive with each soul, and that there must be differences in the quality of his work upon the various souls. We say of a man that he can so fashion himself by habit that a peculiarity may be engrafted upon his character beyond his power to loosen it. This surely implies that the relation of God to the soul is such that, upon condition of the man's choice in a particular direction, God forthwith makes the soul such that choice in that direction becomes easier. For God is the causal fashioner of the soul. Such change at his hands is metaphysical. Constitutional differences in men, whether these differences come as the result of conduct or from native endowment, must be traced to God as their metaphysically effective source.



In the character of Jesus not only do the native endowments point to a difference in the relation to God, but the attitude of the will was such that God could act upon Jesus as upon no other in the history of humanity. Consider that moral and religious fullness of Jesus upon which all schools of students of his life are agreed. The fullness means that from the dawn of consciousness the human Christ assumed such an ethical uprightness before God that God could pour himself out upon Christ in altogether exceptional activities. For the first and only time the Almighty was granted his opportunity with a human soul. As the Master kept himself in unique ethical surrender to God, God acted upon him in such manner as to make the metaphysical relationship also unique. The ethical uniqueness implies and renders inevitable its corresponding metaphysical uniqueness of relation to God. It would seem to us that this course of argument would dispose of the objection that the divine immanence provides no uniqueness of metaphysical relation of Christ to God.

The believer in divine immanence who is also a believer in diviner immanence might not stop even for this word in his haste to an

exposition which he considers more weighty. He insists that, no matter what the metaphysical relation, there can be no doubt about the supreme consideration,—the higher ethical and spiritual relation. In the life of Jesus God has come nearest the human race. In him we see what God is. Whatever the difference between the causal dependence of our souls on God and the dependence of Christ on God, there is an immeasurable dissimilarity in the ethical nearness. While the uniqueness of Christ's metaphysical connection with God may be endlessly guessed at by the theologians, it cannot for an instant be doubted that God is uniquely near Christ in perfect ethical and spiritual indwelling. God comes nearest the race in Christ: in the marvelous balance which is to all discerning worshipers a profounder miracle than any physical wonder could be, in the wisdom which directed every step, in the full-orbed moral love which is the sun of the spiritual sky. These are the signs of the supreme oneness of Christ with God, and having this higher oneness we may well hand any other oneness, physical or metaphysical, over to the schoolmen as a detail of comparatively little importance.

This exposition will satisfy, indeed does satisfy, increasingly large numbers of Scripture students. There is growing agreement that, if we hold fast the spiritual approach to God through Christ, we have the path which leads to life. There are students, however, who are not and cannot be satisfied with the dismissal of a profound theme with an elaboration of the difference between metaphysical and spiritual oneness. They may not formulate the reasons for their dissatisfaction but they are uneasy nevertheless.

If we ourselves come close enough to Christ to catch the spell of his complete devotion to moral love we shall begin to see that for him the law of love finds its expression in the bearing of the cross. The law of love demands self-sacrifice. It sweeps away all hindrances and reckons all burdens as nought in its desire to come spiritually near its object. The actual distance which love will travel in its passion to come into spatial proximity to its object is as nothing, compared to the efforts which it will put forth to get itself understood and to arouse sympathetic understanding in response. All through the life of Christ the student is impressed with the driving of some necessity which impels

the Master to spiritual nearness with men. He seems to be willing to leave no step untaken to share the experiences of men and to bring them to a knowledge of himself. There is an instinct of spiritual travel in him which simply will not rest until it has gone its utmost to come into the experiences of human life and to rouse men to journey toward God along the way of Christ.

Now if we are to believe that this impelling moral love means anything for Christ we are to believe that it means everything for God. If the life of Christ has any message, that message is that the law of moral love is a compelling force with God. When we say "moral love" we indicate the two centers from which the power streams. God is under heavy moral obligations to come near his children in the very deepest sense possible. He has sent his children forth into a terribly painful world, and he must do all he can to render the pain tolerable. He has bestowed upon men the unsolicited boon of freedom—an awful gift—and he is thereby under moral necessity to go to extremes to relieve men from the evil which thus becomes almost inevitable. If God is a moral God we have in the infinite intensity of his ethical life a

mighty pressure which sends him toward the lot of his children. We may speak of this center of power as the conscience of God—to use a term which will suggest an unrelenting insistence. The other center is love. What the moral law puts upon the conscience of God the heart of God accepts with unflinching passion. The Father is under unescapable responsibility for the welfare of his children. He is under the heaviest spiritual bonds. What the moral law demands the spirit of love joyfully yields, leaping to the extreme of cross-bearing in the discharge of the obligation and in the satisfaction of insatiable solicitude.

The question then becomes, What is the most that God can do? What is the length to which he can go? The law of parsimony is out of place here. We are not seeking for the explanation which will barely explain. We are seeking for one which will more than explain,—with a surplus which cannot be compressed within the edges of any formal reasoning. We are dealing with an inevitable impulse which asks us not as to whether this or that will “do,” but whether this or that is the extreme which God can reach with the last ounce of his power. How far can God

come toward his children, and what is the most which he can do to bring them close to himself?

In the light of the urgency of God's moral love we are ready to look again at the problem of Christ. If Christ is only a finite creature of God, has God come as near to us as possible? No matter how complete the ethical richness of the God-life in Christ, has God done all that he can do in taking a human organism and filling it with his own thought? Understand: the question is as to whether God can do more than this. Is this enough?

Many will feel that it is. They will say that it is possible for God so to fill a responsive heart with his own spirit that every word of that soul becomes the word of God, that every deed becomes the deed of God, that every feeling reveals the loving heart of a God willing to suffer with his children. In short, the life becomes such a life as God himself would live if it were possible for him to be reduced to human circumstances. God could not suggest any improvement. He would find this soul such an open channel that he could at last pour himself out to the utmost drop. There would be such complete mutual

sympathy that the sorrows of God would become the sorrows of this soul, and the sorrows of this soul the sorrows of God. If in a moment of distress at the onslaught of sin the soul should cry out, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" the distress would be as real to God as to the soul, for every sorrow of either God or this soul would cut both ways. The soul would become God's masterpiece. God would throw himself into its development in such flood that the metaphysical relationship would be beyond anything known to humanity, and beyond anything attainable by humanity. As the supreme work of the Father and as the supreme response to the ethical cravings of the Father, such a creation could be called in the highest sense the Son of God. Is not this enough?

We must not miss the majesty of this splendid conception. It exalts Christ above all men and gives him a place at the right hand of God. But the question as to whether this is enough or not depends upon whether this is the utmost that God can do. If this is the last throb of self-sacrifice of which God is capable, if this is the costliest gift God can send us, this is enough. If the pressure of his conscience and the imperiousness of his

love can do nothing more than this, this is enough. The thought is certainly beyond the old-fashioned dogma which made Christ a sort of masked God. A God who would surrender nothing of the divine glory, but who, while he appeared to men to be living through the privations of humanity, would be enjoying uninterrupted existence as Deity, would be acting a farce. To men calling for bread he would be giving a stone.

Is there any middle ground, then, between the position that God has masked himself with human flesh and the position that God has merely filled a human organism with his own spirit, where our minds can rest? We think there is. The theory of the community of personal life in what we call the Godhead has been so abundantly ridiculed that many of us think of the idea as completely outdated by the growth of theological intelligence. But in this age-old item of creed there is a road for a deeper coming of God in Christ. We may believe that the urgencies of the spiritual life of God make it morally, even if not metaphysically, necessary for him to put before himself the best object of affectionate contemplation. While we may feel little interest in those fine-threaded dogmas which tell us



that God must, by *metaphysically* necessary process, seek for himself this infinite object, we may yet believe that God must find it under ethical compulsion. If we are judged by the character of the objects we hold before ourselves, much more is God to be judged by the character of the objects he chooses for his eternal gaze. I say "much more," because our objects are for the most part supplied to us. The best we can do is to select from the given. God, on the other hand, is under no such limitation. He can have whatsoever object he pleases. By the demands of ethical necessity he must give himself the best. The most clear-sighted ethical thinkers have never held that a merely impersonal universe would be an ethically adequate object for God. Nor have they been content that he should have nothing worthier than a race of imperfect finite creatures. In a personal Other whom he eternally puts over against himself by an ethical necessity, that is to say by the craving of his love, God has an object worthy of his eternal regard.

There is the best of ethical reasons for the avowal of the church that, without this Other, God could not be the Moral Ideal of Christianity. He would be lost in a smother-

ing egotism. The hypothesis of an eternal Other gives God's love a vent. In this Other he escapes from the over-tightness of personality to which other conceptions shut him. In his Other he finds life, and finds it abundantly.

If now we hold that the Son is bound to God by ethically necessary existence, and that God could not be a fully moral God without the Son, there is no reason why we should make the relation such that the Son could not assume for a time the human condition. In sacrifices undertaken by the Son, in making a revelation through Incarnation, there would be sacrifice by the Father also, more glorious than the sacrifice provided for in the former conception; *and it is in this beneficence that we are especially interested.* The Son, in this thought, is related to God by an organic bond. The Son is that Word which God has been uttering from eternity, and which he has brought within the limits of time and space in the historic career of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus we see the life of God in so far as it can be revealed in human terms. If the Son is one to whom God has eternally given himself by ethical necessity, if there is perfect return of the

Son's love to the Father, if sympathy means more between lives of this kind than it could mean in any other wise whatsoever—if, in a word, the Son is the object which God must have if he is to be an ethical God—then the limitation of the Son to the sufferings and moral perils of the human state becomes the heaviest conceivable cross for the Father. His willingness to yield to the Incarnation means more of a desire to come spiritually near us than could any revelation through a finite human organism created for the purpose. The spiritual approach, the revelation of a desire to make men see that God understands them and loves them and chooses them for his own, takes on enhanced dignity. In the former conception God appears as a rich Father pouring himself out in a creation—lavish, but finite nevertheless. In the other, God appears as so emptying himself in the limitation of his eternal Other that in a profound sense he can be said to have come to us himself.

Of course this argument will be variously estimated according as inner needs assert themselves with greater or less force, but it certainly seems to provide for a closer spiritual approach than any other.

It may seem to the critic as if the argument as thus formulated cancels itself. The aim is to show that God comes spiritually near men, and clauses in our exposition would seem to imply that, after all, he cannot come near men but can sympathize only with his Son. It would seem that he cannot, after all, get near enough to men to make the second theory which we are considering worth much more than the first. Moreover the first view has the advantage of greater simplicity. Our exposition of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son seems over-elaborate and complex by the side of the view which makes the relation of Christ to God one of a human organism transcendently near to God.

The argument may have rather a cumbersome form, but that is the fault of the expositor rather than of the theory itself. The requisite simplicity can be found by gathering the thought up into the statement that God suffered in his Son more profoundly than he could have suffered in any other, and that this suffering was for the sake of men. Whether men can give any coherent and intelligible phrasing to their belief or not, they are nevertheless sure that in holding Christ to be in some sense the Eternal Other of

God they arrive nearer God than in any other Christology. The idea of the Incarnation itself as a great gift from God, an enormous giving of himself without thought of the cost, has always been in the eye of the Church the conception most inherently worthy and most dynamically effective. In the midst of all the losses of this world, in the midst of its heavy burden-bearings, the preaching of a God who has gone to unspeakable cost to show how deeply he longs to come into the life of burden bearing begets the most solid conviction of the diviner nearness of God.

We ought not to pass to a different theme without at least a reference to that phase of the Christ-career upon which some say over-stress has been laid. I mean the death of Christ. There has been of recent years somewhat of protest against the emphasis on the death of Christ, and a call for more attention to his life. The declaration is that in a life history filled with glory from beginning to end all phases must be equally divine, and that therefore the death should not be allowed a monopoly of the Church's attention. It has seemed to many absurd for the Church to speak of Calvary as if that were the one spot

of all where God comes especially near to us.

It is true that many of the discussions of the death of Christ have been so mechanical and external as to thrust God into the distance, rather than to draw him near. Debts due an artificial and cumbersome system of laws touch redemption at best only on the outside, and abstract theorizings about mercy and justice are too light to plumb the deeps. Still, while we concede that the deeds of Christ should be made more of, we must not blind ourselves to the truth that in the death of Christ God does come closest to the very center of our lives. It is with a sound spiritual instinct, if not always with the best theoretical understanding, that the Church has given the Cross the preëminence among her sacred symbols.

There is neither time nor space here to enter into any disputed provinces in the theory of atonement. There is, however, every reason why we should at least indicate the direction toward those agreements upon which we can unite as bringing us very close to God. To start with an item of lesser significance, we can all admit that the death of Christ is the crown of his teaching. No word about the Fatherhood of God compares with Christ's

call to the Father out of the depths of his sorrow. No word about forgiveness compares with that "Forgive them" which shows the agony of physical pain eclipsed by an agony of intercession. It was one thing to teach in general terms, "I am the Resurrection and the Life": it was another and greater thing to take such regal hold on life as to make an engagement on a particular day to meet a resurrected soul in Paradise before sundown. The poise of Christ which reveals to us the moral balance of God—where does this receive the sublimer setting forth: in the Teaching, or in the Death?

We can all agree, too, that we have in the Death, as nowhere else, the revelation of Christ's assumption of the limitations of human life. We may disagree in detail as to how far his knowledge and power were limited in his becoming man, but we practically all admit that his approach to death was from the thoroughly human side. Now we may look just as indulgently and charitably and philosophically on death as possible, but most of our conclusions are swept into the abyss by the presence of death itself. The irony with which the grim-humored destroyer seems to cut off every human life has been

from the beginning the great physical tragedy. If Christ is that Son of God whom we believe him to be, if he comes to put himself at the head of the army of sufferers, he can set on high his claim upon leadership by willingness to enter into that helplessness from which we all shrink and be obedient unto death. If the Son wins his right to rule by virtue of his humiliation to the human condition we can see no way of escape for him from whatever shock there may be in this final experience. He is really anxious to show us that our shoulders are not weighted with any burden which he is not willing so far as possible to take upon himself. That flow of life which we think of as streaming out from Father to Beloved Son is conditioned by the liability to bodily wear and tear which culminates in death. That death is not really terrible but only seems so, that it is the pathway to larger life, becomes clear to us as we see the Son of God approach the experience from our angle and know the pathway as we know it. If the very thought of death seems at single moments to mock our plans and narrow our lives, we cannot say that the thought and the swoon of the experience have not come to the Son. He knows the loneliness of physical



helplessness. Behold the weight of the Cross wall back the mental stream till the bank-full consciousness dwindles, for the moment at least, to a trickling rivulet wandering amid cavernous gorges! If God sends death upon us, behold him, through the suffering of his Beloved Son, taste the cup which he holds to our lips. The Cross proclaims that God has come to the side of sorrow-stricken human beings to help them through the path of death to the field of life, and this gives his leadership new magnetism.

There are even some phases of the bearing of the death of Christ on redemption from sin which we can all accept, without attempting to put our separate items of belief into systematic doctrinal formulation. We can agree that the Cross brings us divinely near the conscience of God, so near that we can feel, as nowhere else, the compulsions of its power and catch against our faces the beating waves of its heat.

Brought thus near the very conscience of God we can all agree that God saves himself by saving men. That is to say, the Cross is, first of all, God's supreme satisfaction of his own conscience, the preservation of his own self-respect. God has sent men forth into a

terrible universe without consulting them, and has thrust into their hands the awful boon of freedom. He is thus under enormous moral obligation. He need not have created men, but having created them he cannot discharge his moral bonds to them and to himself short of Calvary. There is no responsibility in the universe so heavy as that of Creatorship. If the Biblical teaching, that the earthly pain of man is in part at least a consequent of moral evil, has within it a grain of truth it is hard to see how a moral Creator could have peace of conscience without sharing the pain made necessary by the moral imperfections flowing from an unsolicited gift of freedom.

We ought to be able to agree also that God not only saves himself by saving men, but that he saves men by saving himself. By showing the driving force of his own conscience, by revealing his horror of sin in the extent to which he is willing to go to free men from sin, even to sharing the consequences of sin by himself setting on high the holy ideal in the name of which holiness may be found—in a word, by the transcendent tribute of his own devotion to that constitutional moral law which is the expression of his own

life and the foundation of the universe he saves men, and saves them on such terms that they are worth the saving. To sum up, the Cross shows us a Father under moral obligation to exert every moral influence for the moral salvation of his children.

Thus far from the side of conscience; but conscience is not the final word. The Cross is the great historic expression of the Father's love and of the sweep of his personal magnanimity, the inevitable bursting forth of a passion which will battle with sin hand-to-hand rather than let the sons of God perish. The Cross is not only the revelation of the conscience which hates sin, but also the revelation of the heart which loves sinners.

All this seems so abstract, and formal, and technical that we turn for just a word to the vivid life-likeness of the gospel. If we are striving to serve God we are trying not only to keep ourselves in such relation to Christ that we can look upon ourselves as redeemed, but we are also trying to share his work as redeemer. Let us think of the Cross as God's coming near us in those cruel moments when in our efforts to save men we come so close to evil that there seems to be nothing but evil. We are sometimes so overwhelmed by the

rank abundance of sin that the universe seems absolutely opaque,—without a glimmering of light from above. There is an incident in the crucifixion story which must be approached with the most careful reverence, and about which it is sacrilege to speculate in a cold intellectual fashion, but which nevertheless may be so regarded as to bring us very close to Christ and to God. I refer to the Master's cry: "Why hast thou forsaken me?" There is no reason for trying to explain away this cry. Let us take it just as it is. The Master seems here to be passing through a genuinely human experience of distance from God. Those theologians who hold that the physical death itself was *the* experience of distance from God overlook the more positive side, the fact that all the circumstances of the death conspired to emphasize in the mind of Jesus the deadliness and universality of human evil. The priests of the most religious nation condemned him, the officials of the vastest empire carried out the sentence, a disciple betrayed him, and all his followers forsook him and fled. Evil presses upon him with such seemingly triumphant insistence that there seems for the moment to be nothing but evil. Experiencing not that "eternal

now" of omniscience, which sweeps all the universe into one grasp, but knowing from the inside the peculiar human "now," the rhythmic rise and fall of a consciousness which pulses along in successive moments, Jesus finds that, for one instant of consciousness at least, sin completely monopolizes the mental vision. He wonders where God is, and cries out for him. The clouds of evil shut him away. What was agony for Christ must have been agony for the Father. We do not care to reach toward knowledge too high for us or to grasp after experiences not intended for us, but it does seem legitimate to believe that if the very dregs of Christ's humiliation came in such contact with evil that God's face seemed clouded God must have felt even more humiliated in thus having his face darkened. Just how to translate all this into terms of the divine consciousness we do not pretend to say, but the thought puts us on the path of a real suffering for God, and the thought of a real suffering for God through the presence of sin brings him near to us. It not only shows how far he was willing to go to save us, but it gives us a sense of blessed companionship when we go forward against sin to be redeemers together

with Christ, or when we for any cause suffer as innocent for the transgressions of the guilty. Paradoxical as it may sound, in this experience of distance from God, in this momentary sinking which comes with a feeling as if God has withdrawn into some upper chamber, Christ comes into most real nearness to men; and when Christ feels that God has gone farthest from him he has brought God nearest to men.

## XII

### THE PROBLEM OF THE CHURCH

IN view of the implications of the doctrine of the divine immanence, how is the Church to-day especially divine? Is there any sense in which it brings God and men nearer together than do other institutions? Is God to-day in the Church as he is nowhere else?

To raise this question would seem to some to answer it and to answer it in the negative. Some believers in immanence would tell us that God is to-day just as truly in the forces that we once called secular as he is in the Church. He is in the family. He is in business—a man's daily life is to be looked upon

as the great means of grace. He is in political debate, and in all the advance of education. In fact any one of a half-dozen or a dozen institutions of society might be named in which God is present just as truly as in the Church. There is every reason for carrying out the implication of the new doctrine into a practical relating of ourselves to all forms of modern social life as sacred. The kingdom of God is just as truly outside the Church as within. There is no especial nearness of God in the creeds, or the rituals, or the sacraments, or the Sunday services. The coming of the Reformation carried religion away from Church to individual. The day of exceptional sacredness or authority for the Church, because of any peculiar presence of God in it, is gone.

We do not share this thought. We do not believe that the doctrine of divine immanence can be held accountable for any such conclusion, but that the doctrine is compatible with a belief in higher kinds of nearness and even of degrees in this nearness. The conception of the Church has no doubt changed, and is changing, but there is no justification for surrendering the belief in God's especial nearness to the Church because of acceptance of the doctrine of divine immanence.

Let us turn first to the point at which there would seem to be the least likelihood of making out a case for the presence of God in the Church—namely, the claim for the presence of God in the creeds. Creeds have been so subjected to attack in our time that one defends a creed with one's reputation for intellectual sobriety in one's hands. The creed is hopelessly outdated, we are told, and has no more sacredness than any other bit of historic relic.

It may be that this or that creed is outdated, but this possibility does not tell inevitably against the position that there may be some especial nearness of God in creed. If we are to look at the creeds historically it would seem that they have had at times great power to bring men near God. Some periods have been more given to theological statement than others, and in such periods the path of approach to an understanding of God has been largely through the statement of the creed. Historical considerations aside, it would seem that the consensus of devout opinion, equipped with the best learning, seeking only for the truth of God, aiming to reduce the belief to the clearest and simplest form, would have some special divineness, at least



for the time in which the statement was made. In spite of the truth that God is in one way near all men alike we believe that he is especially near good men. If, now, the creedmakers be good men, and have in addition the other qualities which have been alluded to, it would seem that God could and would come near their efforts to seek after and find his truth. If he can be especially near the prophet who seeks to enforce the truth in some particular phase it would seem that he could likewise be near a body of men aiming to get the truth into simple statement for the benefit of an entire Church. This comparison to the prophet is pertinent to-day because there is now so little attempt to put the belief of the Church into compendious statement. At a time when the complexities are emphasized we are over-impressed with the difficulty of putting belief into comparatively brief compass, but we have creeds nevertheless—though these are to be inferred and gathered together out of swarms of individual utterances. We may still hold, since we believe that God comes nearer to good men than to others, that if the prophets are animated by a sincere desire for knowledge God is especially in their utterances.

When the sacredness of creed is up for debate there are always some to draw an unfavorable contrast between the creed-makers of the Church and the creed-makers of science, with the disadvantage, of course, on the side of the Church. We are told that the churchman is biased and arrogant and overbearing in his search for and his handling of his formulas, while the scientist is free from presuppositions and prejudices, entirely humble and docile, and that he always allows his facts to speak for themselves.

Those who have any wide familiarity with the history of the Church can admit with all frankness that there have been some dogmatic theologians whose deliverances would give color to this contrast, but those who have any familiarity with the history of science could speedily call to mind some scientists whose conduct would rob the contrast of its vividness. There have been good scientists and bad scientists, good theologians and bad theologians. By the premises of our contention we are dealing with the theologians of the right spirit, and we can find such. As for the rest, the nearness of God to the creed of science as contrasted with his nearness to the creed of Christianity is to be settled by

the comparative importance of the subject matters. There are grades in truth, and while God is in all truth he is nearest in the highest truth. If the theologian confines himself to the center, and does not try to speak with authority in outside matters, there need not be the slightest reason for conflict with a scientist who exercises like self-restraint; and the theologian who is working at the center can rest in the assurance that he is especially near the thought of God.

A second point at which the man who has a distorted vision of the presence of God in all good things is sure to attack the Church is the sacraments. Some cannot restrain a smile as they tell us that God is in all water and that therefore the sacrament of baptism is not preëminently sacred. They are willing to tolerate the Lord's Supper but would protest against a claim for its especial sacredness.

We will all admit that the old idea that God was miraculously present in the water of baptism and in the wine of the sacrament was nothing but magic, and a rather low and materialistic magic at that. The issue, however, is not disposed of when we have new light on the lower kind of nearness. It is not even touched until it is lifted to the realm of

spiritual nearness. Then we ask whether there is any real approach to God, in the higher sense, through baptism or the Lord's Supper. This in particular cases can only be settled by individual testimony. The soul itself is alone qualified to testify whether with the public consecration there comes any deeper intuition of God or any firmer loyalty of the will. Only the communicant can tell whether the celebration of the Lord's Supper, with a longing for deeper fellowship with the suffering Saviour, brings any illumination or not. It would seem, however, that any rite performed inwardly as well as outwardly would bring some deepening of the consciousness of God and of the duty to him.

Another rules out all church services as lacking any especial sacredness. It is an affront to his intelligence to tell him that God is any nearer a worshiping audience than any other audience of good people whatsoever, or that he is any nearer them in the audience than he is at home. The first section of the protest is met with the obvious rejoinder that men collectively, as well as individually, are nearest God when their souls are filled with the highest contemplation and aspiration.

The other section of the protest suggests

the importance of the audience for the individual's grasp on the truth of God. It is not correct to say that the individual could get everything alone which he can get from worshipping God in the audience. There are some truths which masses of men can grasp better than individuals. The advantages of the Church are obvious when we are thinking of practical activities, but, while less obvious, they are just as real in lofty spiritual communion with God. We may denounce as much as we please what we call crowd-contagion, and when crowd-contagion lends itself to merely emotional and hypnotic excesses we are justified in denunciation, but we must not forget that crowd-influences can be used for good. There is positive virtue in what might be called coöperative listening. The audience as an aid to the speaker is a fact of sufficient self-evidence. Some minds never seem to be really themselves until they are before an audience. The members' help to one another is just as real a fact. The sluggish intellect and faith are quickened in a subtle spiritual way by being brought into the receptive attitude along with others. Thus the audience itself becomes a means for the enforcement of truth. Of course, there are some who never could be

helped in this way—some for whom the audience is more a sinker-weight than a buoy. It has been said that an audience of hearers is like a fleet of war vessels in that the speed is set by the slowest craft. This is not unqualifiedly true. There is a fine sharing of capacity in a receptive audience. The strongest unconsciously lend themselves to the weak, and all see together. The audience becomes an organism for the reception and assimilation of the truth. Now this will probably be true as long as the world stands. There are mental and spiritual powers of high degree which only unfold themselves when groups of souls strive together to grasp a thought or to seize an inspiration. The Christian audience is nerve for the seizure of stimuli from God just as truly as the Church organization is muscle for the accomplishment of practical and material good.

Another, who urges none of these detailed objections, falls back upon a basal claim that a modern man cannot consider the Church as unique in its relation to the truth of God,—that it carries the world no nearer to God than do the family, and the daily work, and the school, and the other social agencies. We have come to know the sacredness of much

that we once called secular, we are repeatedly told, and from henceforth we must not stultify ourselves with the outworn mediævalism that preëminent sacredness attaches to the Church.

It is indeed part of the peculiar privilege of those who are now alive to realize the sanctity with which the agencies once condemned as worldly are invested. We know that the boundary between the secular and the sacred was always largely an artificial one, and that we are happy in reckoning the demarcation as one of the fences which advancing intelligence can well spare. We are not ready, however, to admit that the Church is just one among other institutions. It has, or can have, a rightful title to preëminence. We discuss this question not out of a desire to quibble, but solely because of the likelihood that a wrong perspective here will result in a wrong practical attitude with many, and will lead to no little indifference toward the Church.

The relation of the Church to other institutions is briefly this: The Church sets forth as nothing else can the ideas which should be back of all forms of activity whatsoever, and begets the spirit in which all the works should be carried on. The Church cannot tell how to run a banking system, so far as the details

of management are concerned, but she ought to be the center which generates the right spirit for the management of any and all material forces, and she ought to keep always before the attention of the world the merely instrumental character of the material forces. The Church cannot dictate the policy of educational institutions except in so far as concerns the spirit of learning and the perspective to be observed in the handling and the interpretation of the results. The inner realm of spirit, of motive and deeper ethical intention—this is the field of the Church. We do not say that any one particular Church at any particular time is discharging its duty, but we do say that here is the opportunity for the Church to bring men near to God and to justify its claim to peculiar sacredness.

In proportion as the Church does this will she have the authority of the highest kind,—the authority of spiritual influence. The day is gone when the Church can ask to be obeyed because of the infallibility of Popes, or Councils, or because of the possession of an inerrant guide of any kind. The day is just dawning, however, when the Church, by giving herself to the development of the highest spiritual and ethical life, can win for herself in all relation-



ships to the world such queenly power over the wills of men as she has never before known. It is the barest commonplace that the lack in the world to-day, in business, in society, and in politics, is just this falling short of the right spirit and intention. An organism of believers, built into each other through no external compulsion but through the cohesive affinities of like yearnings for the life of the spirit, can live into modern life the one force which is needed to lift it on high: the spirit of holy love. The love thus begotten will carry an authority beyond anything the world has ever known.

We have not thought it worth while to raise the question as to how far the Church of to-day meets the requirements of this lofty ideal. We certainly do not wish to imply that only members of the visible Church belong to that invisible Church which in all ages has been looked upon as the Body of Christ. But we do mean that it is possible for the Church to-day so to make itself an organism of the invisible spirit of righteousness that no right-minded lover of truth and goodness will feel that he can refuse to identify himself in some vital way with the Church and its activities.

Recalling ourselves to our distinction be-

tween lower and higher nearnesses we can see clearly some dangers which confront the Church in handling her manifold responsibilities. There is first the peril of forgetting the supreme importance of the highest approach to God for the individual member. Inasmuch as we shall devote a section of this essay to the relation of the individual to God, from the standpoint of the individual himself, we here mention the individual's importance only from the standpoint of the responsibility of the Church.

In dwelling upon the importance of the Christian audience we did not mean that the individual ought to be fused into a larger unit and to lose the realization of himself. We meant rather that the audience could arouse the individual to more vivid understanding of the truth. It is the individual at whom the Church should always aim. Now the Church is always in danger of attributing some surpassing worth to herself as over against the individual. She is apt to forget that, sacred as she is, her function is, after all, instrumental. She exists for the members and not the members for her. So that she makes a deadly mistake when she allows the individual to imagine for a moment that any merely external and

artificial relation to herself is sufficient. She makes a mistake when she looks more lightly upon the moral and spiritual shortcomings of the church-member than upon similar lapses outside the Church. The motto which we are often told is best for ourselves—namely, that we should be unsparing with ourselves and sparing with those around us—is a good rule of action for the Church in her demands upon her members. The church ought never to tolerate for her aim any but the most exalted ideal of immediate spiritual approach to God on the part of the individual.

The Church is in danger, too, of perhaps unintentionally emphasizing a lower kind of approach to God in her campaign for the evangelization of those without. We now generally recognize that the great recruiting ground for the Church is the Christian home. In dealing with children, we do not have to be highly endowed to see that the method of individual training cannot safely be abandoned for any artificial method which is more promising as to visible results. As to the conversion of the outsiders, we have swung from one extreme of a pendulum path to another and both extremes have been inadequate. Years ago the method was that of enormous pressure

for instantaneous and visible transformation. Under the throbbing intensity of both preaching and listening, an intensity which seemed at times to lend a rhythmic beat to the air itself, many of the seekers felt the inner walls give way while the flood poured in with great emotional uproar. The normal type of conversion was thus thought to be marked by unmistakable feeling, the feeling being the indubitable sign of the genuineness of the work of grace. It can be seen that where such results were frequent the tendency was to replace the more spiritual approach to God, which takes hold of him by faith whether thrilling excitement accompanies the venture or not, with a reliance upon emotional and nervous accompaniments which could at best only be called an approach to God of the lesser moral and spiritual significance. We have gone far enough from all this. Now our gathering in of the outsiders has in many churches been chilled down to nothing more than a formal enlistment, and the beginner is allowed to infer that it is enough to have his name on the rolls. How far this falls short of real evangelization and Christianization is apparent without comment.

There is danger, too, in the modern method

of carrying on the philanthropic enterprises which are so largely in the hands of the Church. Here the method sins through "wholesaleism." It is doubtful if much spiritual uplift comes out of the elaborately organized and smoothly running machinery of modern philanthropy, where the administration falls into the hands of officials who do not see that, after all, the real task is to bring the individual to a consciousness of his own importance in the sight of God, and to the realization that there is for him, as an individual, an ideal all his own and a path to that ideal all his own. It is of great significance that in the educational systems of our land there is at last a movement away from wholesale methods to those of small group and even of individual instruction. A visit to a modern orphan asylum, where the garments are all alike and where the expression upon the countenance is of one kind, will make us wonder if we are not attacking a vital problem merely from the outside and along the line of the lower approach. Deeper than this fault, however, is the assumption that the ministering to the physical need will of itself necessarily cause a moral and spiritual uplift. Christ himself upon one occasion came equally

near ten sufferers with the touch of physical relief, but in only one was there the slightest attempt to get near Christ in any but the physical approach.

We look now for a moment at the attitude of the Church toward the Christianization of the pagan systems of the world. There is not as much missionary zeal in the Church to-day as there ought to be, and one reason for the indifference is a confusion as to the very types of nearness of which we have been writing. One man takes up an idea discussed in a preceding paragraph, and declares that, since the modern thought is that God is in all religions, there is no call for missionary activity. We do not feel that it is necessary to show again that God is preëminently in Christianity. Another form of the error is the fancy that the spread of modern material civilization will of itself bring about the Christianization of the world. We are told that the steamship lines are bringing the ends of the earth together, that the formation of commercial alliances with heathen nations may be expected to draw the nations to Christianity.

All this rests on the assumption that spiritual contact will necessarily follow physical contact. There cannot be a more grievous fal-

lacy. Take the world-old problem of the relation of the East to the West. From the days of Vasco da Gama on to the present the East and the West have been coming into closer physical proximity, but the physical nearness has not in any large degree been followed by the nearness of mutual understanding and respect. It might not be hard to find facts to warrant a statement so extreme as that, thus far, the material forces of civilization have been used as a gigantic wedge to thrust the East and West further apart. There is certainly a grim irony in the fact that the profoundest respect for the East, on the part of the West, has come from the fact that the Oriental mind has at last found a way to take the science of the West and fashion it into a great war-sledge with which to hammer a so-called civilized nation to impotence. No: the material advance is at best only the precondition and opportunity for the spread of the kingdom. It of itself will not carry the kingdom. The kingdom can only come as there is a desire in the Church to come into spiritual sympathy with the heathen.

We say "come into spiritual sympathy with the heathen." The higher nearness can come about only as we get entirely away from all

suggestion of patronizing the believer in another religion, and from all hostile spirit toward his religion. We must be willing to concede the degree of truth in pagan belief, and from the similarities of paganism and Christianity to build a bridge for closer approach. This is the task before the Church. It can be discharged only as the Church itself comes to an understanding of spiritual approach to God, and to veritable genius in its power to get close to intelligences of alien birth and development.

### XIII

#### THE PROBLEM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

WE come finally to some consideration of the religious experience of the individual in the light of the deeper nearness.

In a preceding paragraph we indicated the boundary at which a theistic immanence saves itself from pantheism. We are to conceive the individual soul as such that it can choose between various courses and as thus having real self-direction. The boundary between the finite and the infinite comes just at this ability of the soul to choose for itself.

At this stage some lose interest. Either they wish to carry God into everything, for the sake of a unity which they feel that they must have if they are to philosophize about the



world at all, or they regard the human will as at best a disturber in the system, and find in the study either of historical or personal life but little satisfaction as compared with that found in the study of those material spheres where God can be regarded as all-in-all.

It is here, however, that Christianity comes in to show a nearness of God far closer than any nearness to any other realm of his creation. We have shown that God is causally present in any change which takes place in the soul, and that he is in a higher way present to those who grasp his will through choice of the higher, that he is near as the revealer of his disapproval in the consequence which overtakes the lower choice. Christianity steps in here to show that the relation of God to the individual soul is the relation of Father to son. We have the picture of a God brooding over the choices of the son with a solicitude and loving attention which he shows toward nothing else. In this alert, affectionate anxiety God is nearest the human heart at that very center of its own choices where the philosopher protests that we have introduced a factor which puts God at a distance.

Confusion is sometimes produced by an unwise use of what is called the contrast between

“natural and evangelical sonship.” It would at first seem that this contrast is in direct harmony with the distinction which we draw between lower and higher nearness. God is equally near all, in that he has begotten all. He is near only to some, however, in that through a spiritual relationship he becomes their father and they become his children. This is true, but the latter thought of nearness will bear more elaboration than this summary sentence. It is true that many do not put themselves into any such relation to God that they come to feel toward him as toward a Father in heaven. They do not care to do the works of the Father and they apparently never think of themselves as sons of God. In spirit and intention they are far from God. If fatherhood for God means anything, however, it must mean that he is in a manner spiritually near even those who care not for him. His love must go out to them, not with the approval with which it rests upon those others who do his will, but with longing and passion to bring the indifferent to themselves and to him. If we are to think otherwise, if we are to think that his heart and mind are not interested until we make some approach to him, if we are to think that he is far from us until

we take the first step toward him, we empty the gospel of its meaning. We are by birth sons of God, not only in that he has begotten us, but in that from the beginning he takes the attitude of loving nearness to us. Of course, there is nothing here to conflict with the truth that the highest nearness comes as the son returns the thought and feeling of the Father, and that this life-giving self-surrender is indispensable for any vital salvation.

Christianity's conception of Fatherhood has the further advantage that it sweeps away all mass-conceptions as to the race, and makes all considerations individually personal. With this we see that the value of the race for God does not consist in "masses" or in "humanity" or in "man." As has been suggested before, associated with others we discover powers which we alone could never unfold, but, after all, these powers are the possessions of individual persons. While we are made for a social organism, yet we are not merely stuff for a body of humanity. We see fairly clearly also that the only realities which can have value for God are not impersonal ideas or impersonal forces. Idealism at first left us with the impression that God is most interested in contemplating the fascinating intellectual

creations of his mind, but when idealism had further worked itself out it meant not *idealism* but rather *personalism*. That is to say, the substantial elements in the world are not abstract ideas. Abstract ideas could not absorb the entire attention of a personal God. They could make no return to him. No; the only beings which could make return are individual souls. These alone can have any kind of self-existence or any measure of independence. A day which speaks much of huge thought-generalizations as the uppermost treasures in the eye of Deity, and of huge impersonal forces as the object of his will, needs to learn that thought is only an activity of a personal thinker and force an abstraction from a personal doer. The creations upon which God can throw himself with abandonment are persons. He is more deeply *in* his relation to these individuals than in any existence which does not rise above the impersonal realm. The teaching of Christianity is that the relation to these individual realities is that of father to son. Christianity means that persons have supreme value for God above all other creatures which he has made. If we ask them what part of creation stands nearest to God, we have to reply that the individuals whom

we have been taught to look upon as sons of God have this high honor.

Another point deserves attention. As was said in one of the opening paragraphs of this essay, one of the most effective forces in bringing the world to the realization of the divine immanence has been the more rational idealism which is becoming increasingly popular. According to that idealism the world is the idea of God energized by his active will, and we come to knowledge of this world by rebuilding it in our consciousness. We attain the truth concerning this world when we see it as it exists for God. The world is not an idea set before my gaze alone. It has an objective reality for God in that his will is giving it more than bare mental existence. It is his deed as well as his thought. Now in reconstructing this world in my own thought I may make mistake. I may use my senses carelessly or I may put a strictly subjective interpretation on their report. To guard against the anarchy and chaos which would result from letting every man have his own world, mistakes and all, the philosophers have agreed that we shall take only those aspects of thought as true which are in a measure common-to-all. The aim here is perfectly appar-

ent. The philosopher must have some safeguard against being imposed upon by the whims and eccentricities of personal aberration, and so finds God especially in the common-to-all rather than in the merely special to me.

This will do for a sort of rule-of-thumb for dealing with the external universe, though even here the limitations are apparent. The senses of the trained experimenter or highly endowed nature-lover are not common to all by any means. The interpretations of science which have had most of helpfulness for the world have at first contradicted every maxim of common sense. All this aside, it is to be insisted that we cannot hold unqualifiedly to the correctness of the thought that God is in the common-to-all in our relation to the material universe. It may be that there are views and interpretations and suggestions intended only for one.

However this may be with the world of external revelation, it is certainly not true that in the kingdom of the inner life the divine comes near us most especially in the common-to-all. If God is really in all things, even as the causal agency, the peculiarities which mark us off from others must have come from him in so

far as they are not the product of our own morally faulty doing or imperfections for which we are to be held responsible. That something which marks us off we must look upon as a sacred gift from God and as an object of sacred regard to God. It is intended that there should be phases of the universe for us and him alone, and even he is unobtrusive in his relation to these deeper phases of our existence. There is no warrant for believing that in the most real aspects of our lives he is to be pleased chiefly by the attributes which are most nearly alike in all of us. Even if the race were to be thought of as having its chief value for him as a social organism, we should see that the perfection of the organism could come only by giving a separate distinctiveness to the various parts. If we replace the thought of organism by the thought of family, we see that the Father rejoices in that separateness which gives each child a character of his own.

In this separateness and distinction of the individual life lie the glory and tragedy of the moral choice. In this universe which is half mine and half God's there is *the* opportunity to come to spiritual nearness to God. In my selfness God is supremely interested. He will

do nothing to break through it, and yet he desires as my Father to come into personal intimacy with me. This is the sphere of personal dependence of the highest degree—the world where I receive inspirations from God intended for me alone, where I can really give God something which he can receive nowhere else—the world of mutual spiritual confidences. If there is to be a family there must be a common-to-all, but if there are to be separate children there must be differences.

In the light of this view the individual's coming to God means his awakening to a realization of his essential relation to God and of his value to God, together with his determination to be the most that is possible for God. He is to make the relation to God personal. Instead of taking laws as impersonal forces he is to grasp them as a personal God's method of dealing with him and with other individuals. He must conceive all the influences which come into his life as the attempts of the personal Father to reveal to the son the place which he has for the son.

In this relation of the individual soul to God there has been another misunderstanding of the doctrine of divine immanence,—this time to the effect that the new doctrine would



have us consider all operations of the mind equally likely to bring us to God since he is in all workings of the life. Some have thus insisted that God is as likely to be reached by the sentient life as by any other, or that the full round of legitimate human pleasure is as full of revelation as anything else. Others have told us that by reasoning we find out God, or by the cultivation of the æsthetic capabilities.

It would be needless to deny that God is in all these processes, but he is, above all else, in the moral springs of our lives. The intellect and sensibility are the servants of that moral intuition which points toward the realm of "oughtness" and clamors that we surrender our activities to the highest spirit of holy love. There is a center in the God-life around which all else turns,—the spirit of holy love. His mind exists not by itself, but turns its light upon the eternal pathway of holy love. His life of feeling is moral. His æsthetic life serves to beautify the expression of the righteous love. The soul that puts moral love before itself is on the straightest path for the quick understanding of God. The Father comes near when the son finds the spirit which should guide his will.

Our standpoint suggests some reflections of importance concerning providence, and especially concerning what we call "special providences." The older belief was that God would upon occasion break through the natural system of law for the sake of specially delivering, or relieving, his children in distress, or for the purpose of snatching them out of the jaws of peril which they themselves might not see. The newer thought does not find God in these special comings, but looks for him in all things. With some the doctrine of divine immanence has practically done away with the idea of providence.

For this mistake, as for so many others, the new doctrine is not to be held accountable. We make all of God's dealing with men special providences. If we are to take the doctrine of Christian immanence with any kind of seriousness, we must see that God's children did not happen into existence by accident and that God afterward showed them how they might make use of the universe. God has provided for us, and for us as individuals. We must here keep closely to the personal. The true father who would foresee exactly the character of the coming child would make exact preparation for just the

kind of child he was to have. We can believe that the divine love has foreseen and provided just thus exactly and specially. The new doctrine makes possible a more special nearness than the old. Anything which happens to me which does not come out of the evil or imperfect choice of a finite will, my own or some one's else, happens because God specially intends it. Upon the occasion of an evil result from a poor choice he is near, in the sense that he strives to do what is best under the circumstances. We are not to look upon the universe as a somewhat usable mystery which we are to get along with as best we can, without feeling that its particular results for us are intended. Anything which happens to us is intended. It may be that, in the light of some other result which is accomplished by the workings of the system, the effect upon us may seem to be a by-product, but even here we are to think of the by-product as intended and as in its spiritual outcome of supreme importance to us, and to God in his love for us. We are to have all the good that there was in the old doctrine of predestination—for there was much good in that old doctrine, no matter how intolerable its total effect. We are to believe that God sends everything that happens to us

as intended especially for us, whether we can see the purpose or not. If we can once master this thought we can have all the good in predestinationism without the evil.

We are to believe that God's thought and love, as well as his causal activity, are near us at all times, we say, whether we can see his purpose or not. So far as the outward facts of our lives go, it is likely that we shall more often than not fail to catch the purpose. This comes, first, out of the inevitably earthy thought of good fortune which clings to even the best minds. If two believers are together in a burning building, and one reaches safety while the other perishes, it seems easy to discern the plan of God for the survivor, and we feel especially near God in having a definite glimpse of his plan. Yet the plan of God that the other should die seems, upon careful reflection, just as definite. In the next place, we fail to come to an adequate hold on the plan in the providences because we are dealing with factors which are immortal. The conditions of immortal life are so completely beyond us that we cannot tell in a particular crisis just what the plan calls for. Thus it may be that we fasten upon trifles of slight

significance as bringing us especially close to the thought of God for us.

Let us think of a child for whom provision has been made in the will of a father now deceased. The child hears the will, full of references to acres and landmarks and division lines which he does not comprehend. He may hear something about stocks and securities, or about provisions for education,—all of which is meaningless to him. After all else he learns that the father's watch or the grandfather's sword is to be given him. Now his eye lights and his heart rejoices. In these tokens he feels that the father has again come near him. Much of our thought about God's coming especially near us in earthly providences is likewise limited and childish.

Still there are no doubt passages in our experiences when we do feel that we have an exceptionally clear view of God's thought for us, at least in some particular, and we rejoice at the consciousness of the nearness of mutual understanding. In such moments let us rejoice, but let us remember that he also is near God between whom and God there is such thoroughness of reciprocal understanding that each can trust the other,—the son trusting God as he receive providences with no light

upon their meaning and God trusting the son to take these providences in the spirit in which they are sent without accompanying explanation.

This has to do more particularly with the providences in external event. What shall we say about the consciousness of the presence of God in the inner realm? We see that God is not given to reporting himself in our consciousness by miraculous breaking in upon the ordinary mental movement. In the teaching of the new doctrine God comes near in all worthy soul-stirrings. Spreading his activity out over so large a surface seems to many, however, like putting him away altogether. Can the newer thought be said to provide for especial moments of divine nearness?

If we look upon the soul's unfolding as taking place after the manner of an organism of a more material kind we can see that there may be special seasons which correspond to the flowering-out of a plant. God is in all the activities of the plant. He is present in the apparent deadness of the winter; he is present in the period of blossom and in the period of green bitterness as well as in the period of ripened fruit. But the ripened fruit brings us nearest him in that it shows the thought which

he had in mind through the earlier stages. If we were to pick out the seasons when God seems nearest us in the life of the world around we should select the spring, with the beauteous prophecy of fruitage to come, and the harvest, with the glorious success of the forces which have worked through snow and rain and heat. So in the work of God in the soul. It certainly seems that many of our thoughts and feelings pass through these organic stages. God is in all, even in the bitterness of the green and half-ripe stage, but we see him most clearly at the spiritual harvest, when the completed spiritual outcome, the consciousness of firmer grasp on God, the conviction of deeper understanding of his will, seem to show the goal toward which all the previous experience has been advancing.

The minister may know from experience the inner meaning of this suggestion. It may be that in the preparation of messages for his people he goes through long periods of uneasy, restless, turning and re-turning of ideas which at first seemed to promise much but which come to be less satisfactory with further reflection. If the student continues he finds, however, that some worthy conclusion comes, —it may be that this conclusion bursts upon

him like a flash of light. As he gives the result to his people they feel under the spell of direct inspiration, and the minister himself may in a worthy sense share this feeling. God was in all the previous groping of the mind, through the steps which seemed so unsatisfactory. Yet God seemed especially near the thinker at the moment when he grasped the conclusion and climax toward which all had been converging. So it frequently is in life experiences which involve the whole man. God has been in every step of the mind, heart, and will, yet we have come especially near him at the climax in that there we have entered more understandingly into his thought.

Let us now lift our view to a higher plane and speak of the relation between the soul and the higher Soul as what it essentially is—a surpassing friendship between our souls and God; a friendship so deep that our thought of the relation of father and son hardly expresses its intimacy. Can we say that this friendship always moves along by a level path? The friend is always near us, in the sense that his thought and love go out toward us, but friendship has its rapt moments which bear in themselves the witness to their own worth. Circumstances may conspire in such wise as



to bring us closer together in a single instant than in all the previous progress, so far as this deepening of understanding goes. You were near your earthly friend through a score of precious years, but you never understood him before as you did in that time of special crisis. You never knew how much you cared for him, or he for you, till at that moment of mutual concession and sacrifice. To speak of personal experience as if in this sense of mutual comprehension and appreciation the friendship always moves on an exact level is to distort and even to caricature the experience. There are ups and downs between our souls and God just as there are ups and downs in our relations to our friends. There are moments when we rise to the mountain of lofty exultation and rapture, and there are moments when the clouded purpose of each gives the opportunity for mutual trust.

This leads to the bearing of our thought on the idea of prayer. The doctrine of divine immanence has had something of an unforeseen result on the attitude of many toward prayer. Since the coming in of the new conception repeated emphasis has been laid on the idea that all parts of our lives have power to express ourselves to God just as all parts of the life

around us have the power of expressing God to us. So that there has been, not through deliberate intention but through a misinterpretation of immanence, a falling away from the certainty of coming especially near to God in direct prayer.

The doctrine of the divine immanence need not interfere with this direct union of the soul with God. It is hard to see how we can come to God in this higher nearness without an attempt to utter ourselves in definite speech to him. The nearness grows as we give it specific attention. The presence of God means more for us as we bring the present God to definite attention before our minds. Modern psychology has done a valuable service in bringing it out clearly that we cannot drift to any kind of perfection. There must be deliberate fastening upon a desired object and, if necessary, a standing against all external or internal commotion which would distract and dissipate the effort. If there is anything more definite than prayer for fixing the attention upon God, we do not know what it is. If God is personal at all he can certainly be reached by such speech. The newer views help us to see that no barrier can make it impossible or improbable that he will suggest his thought

to us in return, just so far as we can receive that thought.

This, however, does not exhaust the theme, we are told. The new doctrine at once cuts away from us the likelihood that God will answer prayer by any kind of miracle. The answer, if it comes, will come by natural steps. If it comes, though, by natural steps, what right have we to the conclusion that God is answering us, or that our petition has brought him especially near us? To put the question in the ordinary form, would not the outcome have been the same whether we had prayed or not? God is in all and his loving purpose broods over all. He does not ask to be asked to help us. We no longer think of a far-away God who has to be called to come into our world. He is already here.

This seems final when thus put, but this is not the only possible way of putting it. It may be that God has conditioned himself by our freedom. It may be that he can do what he desires for us only as we remove the limitation upon him by our own attitude. It may be that the coming of God in some of the weightier revelations depends upon ourselves.

To begin with the application of this conception which seems most perplexing, we take

the relation of the divine will to the material universe. From the beginning the greatest difficulty has been to believe that prayer can be effective toward producing changes in the external system. Clearly, now, God is conditioned in his power over matter by the freedom of men. It would seem that God would prefer roses to weeds, but he sometimes waits for the roses until there rises a practical prayer for roses on the part of men, a prayer which is sincere enough to include the enlistment of the petitioner's will. Think, too, of the connection of mind and body. We know that body conditions mind, of course, but we also know that mind conditions body. That is to say, God has to wait for the right mental attitude before he can produce a finer quality of brain substance. Or widen the view so that it includes those bodily changes outside the brain which come as the accompaniment of certain states of soul. From all these we get a hint which is at least suggestive. It may be that God is likewise conditioned in his control over more remote circumstances of our lives. What is to make us think that God is conditioned merely in relation to our bodily changes? It may be that in many phases of material activity he cannot move till we move.

This does not mean that he will heed a lazy begging or a persistent but frivolous teasing. It does mean that in some cases he may in a measure have limited his control over the material universe, and that he cannot move until we lock our wills with a "setness" sincere enough to do all within our power to bring about the prayed-for result, or until we are willing to persist in this fixed "will-setness" after we have done all.

This suggestion is offered for what it may seem to be worth. However it may be with God's sway over the material world, we feel that God has conditioned himself by our freedom in his control of the world of persons. The secret of intercessory prayer seems to lie here: that God has so limited himself in the creation of the social organism that the spiritual condition of one part inevitably affects his relation to all the parts; or, to keep to the higher figure of the family, in his relation to his children he has conditioned himself by the feeling of the children toward each other. If this at times seems hard we can only say that we have here another instance of the tremendously tragic significance of human freedom. Mighty spiritual effects flow out from the attitude of our wills.

There may be doubt still as to both these latter suggestions. We come, then, to a field where it would hardly seem possible to doubt, namely, the individual life where the object sought is distinctly spiritual gift. While God is at all times near men, in that his love goes out toward them, he can come nearest only to those who desire him so definitely that in one way or another they bring their need to definite petition. It may be that the petitioner does not know God after the manner of the orthodox, but if his petition for light is honest it is hardly conceivable that the God of love will not do all in his power to grant the petitioner's request. It is impossible for God to send upon us the highest enlightenment unless we profoundly desire it, and impossible for him to disregard our prayer for the largest spiritual gift that we are capable of receiving. These two impossibles are the gist of the philosophy of prayer. Of course, we may ask for illumination beyond our mental or moral grasp—hence we say the "largest spiritual gift which we are capable of receiving." In this connection it is well to remember that the patience with which we meet the apparent unresponsiveness of God to requests for what we conceive to be the highest is itself the best

of gifts, much better than any other spiritual gift for which we are likely to pray.

We are haunted here by a remnant of the deism which pronounces the influences which we are discussing merely "reflex." Many a man concedes efficacy to prayer in its reflex influence but protests that there is nothing of direct, special approach of God in an answer that comes of itself, which indeed is hardly to be called an answer. The thought of divine immanence comes in, however, to help us to see that there is no such merely reflex influence which moves of itself. God is so near us that what the deist calls reflex is the direct and immediate approach of God.

There may be inward protest against what might seem over-emphasis on the individual in these last sections of the essay. One charge will be that we have not laid enough weight on the great uniformities, and that we have left the door ajar to all sorts of individual eccentricity and irregularity. Another will say that we have encouraged introspection, and that, too, in face of the sane and healthy movement of the day toward the objective in religious thought. Still another will believe that we have missed the vision of social service, which is likewise a glory of the religious

world to-day, and that the erection of the individual into an end in himself will lead to gross religious selfishness. There is truth in the more socialistic conceptions of to-day, we may be told, to which all such essays as this run counter.

All these objections can be met in setting forth the ideal of religious service. That ideal we conceive to be simply this—bringing God near and making more and more possible the diviner immanence.

First, it is clear that we are to bring him near ourselves. We are to do all possible to get hold of the spirit that he has for us and live that spirit out into incarnation. We are to come into deeper and deeper friendship with him. This does not mean introspection. The thought is to be turned toward God. It does not mean selfishness. There are some goods whose pursuit does not come out of selfishness. The desire for the companionship of God is one of them.

Second, we are to bring him near to others. The resolution to bring God near to others is to arise out of a realization of the sacredness of the individual in the sight of God. We are to move out to bring men near God, not only through love for them but from knowledge of



God's valuation of them. The only method here is to do what we can to put others on the way that leads to God. There is nothing that we can give men here. We must act as the wisest helpfulness always acts: we must put men on the track of doing something for themselves. It might be said that our work here is in putting men on the track for themselves, or starting them out to the realization of the value of their own souls in the sight of God and of the distinctiveness of God's friendship for each of them.

We have said that there is nothing we can give men. This is wrong. We should say rather that there is nothing we can give except ourselves. In all our giving we fall short unless the gift carries with it something of ourselves. Our divine Master is our pattern here as everywhere. While he kept himself at all times near to God he kept himself near to men also. The Incarnation did not exhaust itself in his assumption of certain general human conditions. He made the limitation of himself the law of his life. He tried to come down into the life not only of the race but the life of every man whom he met. On the cross he cried out for the forgiveness of his persecutors—which can only mean that for the mo-

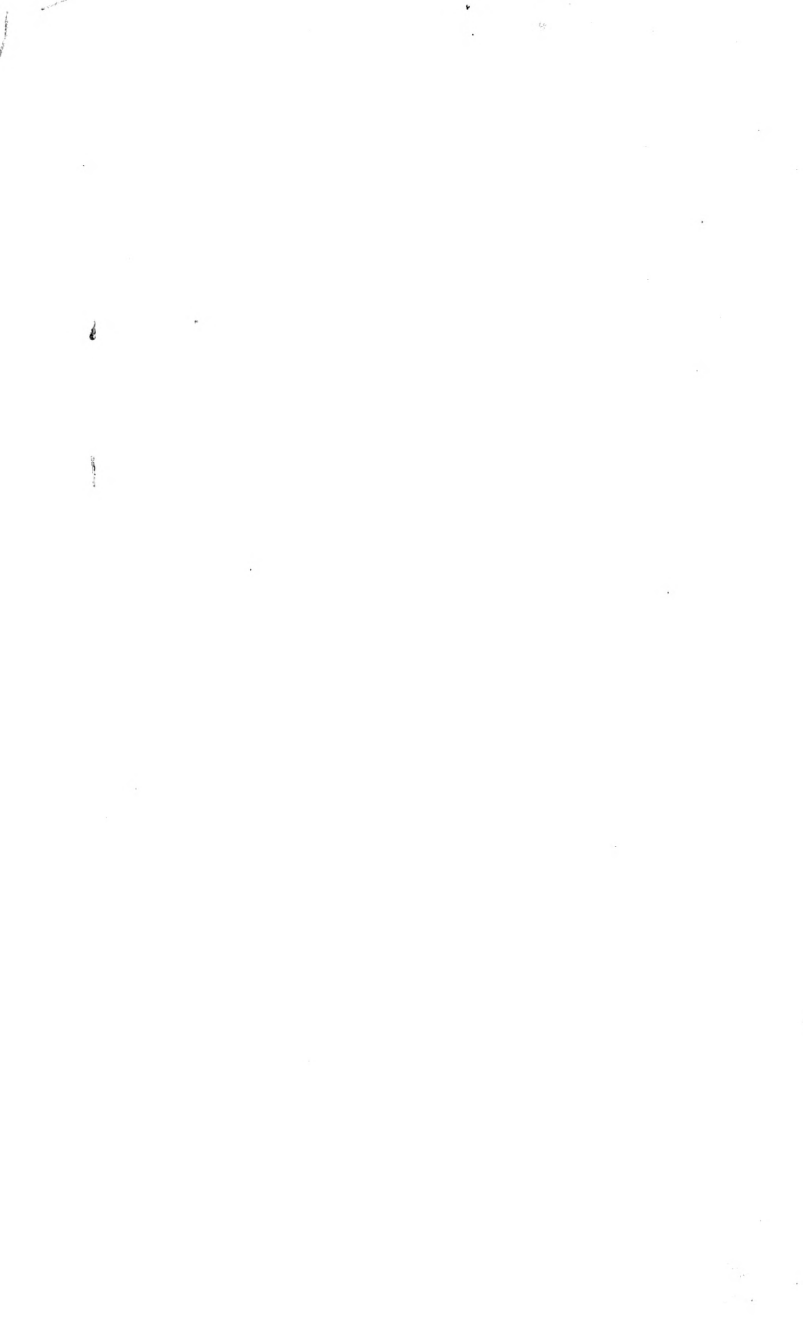
ment he put himself in their place and tried to look out through their eyes. So far as he could he entered into the lives of others to show them the way out toward God. He came near men not to bring God to them in any external contiguity, but to impel them to a venture toward God on their own account. This is all we can do for any man. We can do all we can to put him in the way of God. He must walk the way himself.

Once more: we are to do all we can to bring about the higher immanence of God in the laws and conditions of human life, even in the material earth itself. It may be charged that this essay opens the gate to eccentricity and irregularity. It is not intended so to do. The essay aims to show that the laws are of God, but that they exist as instruments in the service of persons whose individual souls are the supreme earthly objects of God's regard. The earth itself is but a material instrument for the help of souls. God is near it at all times in the sense that it is the expression of his activity, but it may be—no, it surely is that he is limited to a lower range of material activities because of the unresponsiveness of our wills. The earth may or may not be cursed in the sense that it owes its present condition

to the devastations of evil, having fallen away from a paradise state because of the evil of men. It is, however, far from expressing as yet the high thought that God has for it, since it must so largely be used to restrain irresponsible wills rather than to let them loose in the upper ranges of freedom. Our high privilege is to take even the material earth and by perfect responsiveness to the will of God bring God nearer to the earth than he is now. The universe has almost endless possibilities for bringing him near, in revealing his loving thought and purpose for men, and it is within our grasp to make possible a diviner immanence in the very earth itself.







BT124.F06 BOSTON UNIVERSITY BOSS

The diviner immanence,



1 1719 00088 9180

